

喬林 知

Tomo Takabayashi Presents



めざせ ユノヲハ海の果て!

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マのマく海の果て!

Kyou Kara Maou - Volume 09

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Novel Illustrations

Prologue

Prologue



His beautiful Majesty.

His pitch black eyes shine in the sunlight, his royal hair, soft as a baby bird's [1] wings gleam in the moonlight.

The voice that comes from those pink lips is like the melody emanating from a musician's strings.

And those fingernails, white as the seashells washed by the tide, and those fingertips, slender as cotton— Oooooh, my beautiful Majesty the Maou (nosebleed sprays)!

I will offer my body, my heart, to stay by your side (nosebleed intensifies)!

I am willing all my love and respect solely to you, and you alone (nosebleed fountain explosion)!

Eh?

Your Majesty, how can you say you don't need it, please don't utter such cold words~!

References

1. [↑](#) I think there's an odd name here, probably some weird Mazoku bird

Chapter 1

Chapter 1[edit]

I know this is all very sudden, but I got a girlfriend.

Out of the blue.

No telling sign foreseen whatsoever.

Even the love-forecast had predicted rain.

I can hardly believe it that the person beaming at me from across is my girlfriend, and that we're actually 'going out' beginning from now.

For one thing, I've been unpopular for too long.

16 years. Sixteen. Since the day I was born, I have never been in a proper romantic relationship.

There had been instances when I thought - hey it might work out this time - but in the end it always came down to the question: 'Which do you like better, baseball or me?'.

You can't compare people and baseball, I would reason. Still they would put pressure on me to 'choose'. Murata told me to just give an answer right off the bat even if it was a lie, while my mother's advices weren't of help at all.

'Yuu-chan, worrying will make you grow taller~' that was what she said.

Well if that were true, I should have long since grown over 190 centimeters tall.

What I've learned from these bitter experiences was, that it was impossible for me to pursue a romantic relationship during the fall.

It's because the pennant race in Mount Tenou takes place during August and September, , followed by the Japanese Series.

There's no time to waste being giddy over love.

In view of such circumstances, this time around the timing couldn't have been

any better.

It was the end of October - and everything had been settled.

Driven to utmost despair, I felt so empty, as if devoid of a soul - I could not speak of baseball at all. I even went as far as considering going into hiding deep in the mountains until spring came, to lead a secluded life without a TV or a radio - to run away from reality.

That turned out to be my stroke of luck.

Having had enough of my sulkiness, Murata dragged me out to his school fair, where I was approached by a schoolmate from middle school.

"Shibuya-kun?"

Yup, my name is Shibuya Yuuri, but very few schoolmates call me "Shibuya-kun" instead of "Shibuya Yuuri Harajuku Fuuri."

'Previous' schoolmates, to be exact.

She was clad in the uniform of a Missionary school located north of the prefecture. In terms of National Mock Exam scores, it's placed 10 points above me, which rattled my slight complex.

"Er..."

"Who's this, that's what you're wondering, right?"

Murata, who was standing beside me, asked in an easy-going voice, 'Hashimoto?'

Working for his class as a waiter at the fair, he had donned a flower print apron he brought from home.

This bespectacled guy who was in the same class as me during the 2nd and 3rd years of middle school, has way better memory than me. In the National Mock Examinations he always ranks at the top, and as such is currently attending a prominent prep school in Tokyo.

He is lauded as the greatest genius to have ever attended the school.

In fact, what he remembers is not only his life as Murata Ken. He also remembers his past lives from long long ago as one would the story of movies,

tucked away between the folds of his brain.

To me, Murata is a very special kind of person, but no one around me knows this. The fact that he is the Great Sage with knowledge of two world's worth of history is something no one would believe even if I told them so.

If there's something I don't know, Murata is the one to turn to; we've become pretty comfortable with this routine.

So I turned to Murata to ask as I always do.

"Hashimoto? Who is-"

"Why don't you ask me myself?"

She asked demandingly. It was a valid argument.

I looked straight at her and asked.

"So, what club activity were you in, Hashimoto?"

"Wait a second, that's your first question? Wouldn't you normally ask for my name or class number?"

"Fine", she said, weaving her finger through her short hair.

"I was in the tennis club. Though I stopped after I tore my Achilles' tendon."

"Ah! So you're Hashimoto Asami from the 3rd floor class! The one who was carried away by the coach like a princess!"

"Oh, you remember me from that incident?"

'Cause that episode led to a huge uproar afterwards.

The trite facts were that a tennis player had torn her Achilles' tendon during a friendly match with another school, and that the Maths teacher who was the coach and advisor, had taken her to the hospital in his car.

As the responsible faculty member what he did was nothing special, but since the coach was young and single - not to mention handsome too - she'd become the target of jealousy by the other girls in the tennis club.

It happened around when I punched the coach of the baseball team, but the way the rumors spread was entirely different. Gossips, that she was going out

with the coach or that they'd gotten engaged, were circulated, so for her it was probably an awful memory.

"I'm sorry."

"Hm? There's nothing to apologize for."

"I said something insensitive, didn't I?"

"That's OK."

"No, it isn't. I would have been angry if someone remembered me from such an incident."

Hashimoto Asami tucked the loose strands of hair behind her ear.

Her hair was short, touching just below her ears, probably a habit from her tennis days.

"It's fine."

"Oy~ You two there~"

Murata Ken, in his flower print apron, put his finger to his glasses like a parent at a PTA meeting.

"Don't just hang around in the hallway, head into the coffee shop over there. Come and contribute to our class' sales."

"The coffee shop?!!!"

Though we'd just been reunited, we shouted together as one.

This prep school is severely lacking in ambition - the lined up mock shops looked more like standing Soba stalls than a coffee shops.

"That's right, that's our Maid Cafe."

"MAID CAFE?!!"

Looking in from the entrance, we couldn't see any costumed waiter. There were only a couple of awkward apron-clad students who were dozing away in boredom.

"Sure. Since we're here, better contribute to the fund-raising."

In big step worthy of a sports woman, Hashimoto walked inside.

At that, a few of the waiters raised their right hands in unison and spoke.

“Maido[1]~”

“Not Maid Cafe, but Maido Cafe?”

“Cafe au lait for me. What about you, Shibuya-kun?”

Securing a seat by the window, Hashimoto looked back at me.

“Er, milk.”

“Milk? Doesn’t the menu say ‘Hot milk’? Well, milk it is. That’s very like you, Shibuya-kun. Cafe au lait and milk please. Oh and this [Forest Bear-san’s handmade Mysterious Object]…… is this some kind of hot-cake or pancake?

“A Mysterious Object.”

Taking out a slip from the apron’s pocket, Murata begin jotting down the order.

“That too, then.”

Knowing that it’s a [Mysterious Object], she’s still placing the order.

She’s a tough daredevil, beyond my expectations.

Pulling out the chair, I sat myself across from her.

On the clumsily draped table cloth, there was a mark left from the previous customer’s cup.

“Now then.”

Hashimoto settled her hands on her knees and straightened her back, smiling all the while. Because I’ve rarely had the chance to be with a girl my age, everything she did was a novelty.

“Nice to meet you again, Shibuya-kun. It’s been a while, how have you been?”

“You sound like a Radio DJ. I’ve been doing okay. How ‘bout you, Hashimoto?”

“I am doing well myself.”

What worries me is the conversation that’s to follow.

Lucky for me, I have no energy left to wear out my companion by

overwhelming them with a one-sided talk about baseball. On the other hand, I have no special topics to elaborate on either, and can only wait for the drinks, while observing the face before me.

But, Hashimoto was different from the girls I'd met before.

She was the type to take matters into her own hands.

"Your uniform's quite unlike the usual. Gakuran, hm? You go to a public prefecture school, right? What is it like there? Do they have less strict rules?"

"Not sure, since I don't know what it's like in other schools. Yours is that Ladies Prep isn't it? Do they say 'How are you feeling today?'"

"Yes! In the mornings and afternoons, they say 'And how are you feeling today?' We have Mass on Saturdays, and learn French as second foreign language."

"Second foreign language?! We're still high school students, must we know more than English? Wow, prep academies really are tough."

To this exaggerated response of amazement from an average high school kid, she giggled out loud.

Cute, I thought.

Cute, but it's nothing like the sensuality that enslaves the hearts of men in an instant. Unlike the women I'd encountered in the other world, she's neither bewitching or clever, nor valiant or overflowing with compassion.

Instead from her fine lips, pleasant words flow continuously.

Behind the appropriately long eye-lashes, her standard Japanese almost-black pupils are vibrant.

The commonplace water-color blouse and checkered skirt doesn't intimidate me - who has had a long history of having no girlfriends.

While she lacks the sensuous charm of a mature woman, any unpopular guy can sit across from her without becoming anxious.

"Our French teacher, Marianne, is beautiful but really peculiar. We were told that growing armpit hair was a fad during Marianne's school days."

"He's a guy?"

"Oh, no, she's a woman. Madam Marianne was so compelling I went and joined the French Academic Club. What about you, Shibuya-kun? Have you been doing anything fun?"

"Fun, huh..."

Murata came to us with a gleeful face, and placed the cups before us.

I don't know if it counts as 'fun', but I've been going through some very extraordinary experiences for a couple of months now.

It all began that May, just as I'd gotten into high school.

On the way back home from school, while attempting to rescue Murata from a mishap - would you see that! - I was transported to another world through a Western toilet. Surrounded by super-beauties and blond pretty boy, also flying skeletal models, I was told a shocking revelation.

You are the King of our country!

Finally you have returned to where your soul belongs.

Simply put, My Return.

The birth of - not a student CEO, but a student King - with lands and numerous subjects to govern.

More over, it's not like any common leadership post.

I probably couldn't win against Shima Kousaku^[2] in popularity to women, but it's a definite landslide win for me in numbers of followers.

Even though I was just your average baseball kid, with average features and average brainpower....

It turned out that I was the Demon King.

The profession given to me after I was suddenly transported to this other world, was neither that of a hero, a prophet or a savior - but the Demon King

Highness.

From the human's point of view, I'm the enemy's last boss.

Bearing black hair and eyes, I am an ill-omen, feared as much as hated.

But even if I explained this, no one would believe me.

Holding my palm against my chest, through the shirt I clutched the 500yen sized stone.

A stone with silver rim and blue hue deeper and darker than that of the sky.

The surface of the Seibu Lions' blue stone, which I received from the person who named me, was cold and smooth.

"...There hasn't been anything special."

Concealing this world-shattering experience, I laugh hastily in reply.

Compared to before, I am much more at ease now.

It's because I have Murata Ken who is something of a comrade, to share this secret with, a dream-like secret that's far from being a dream.

"Liar."

"Eh?"

Hashimoto seemed to have noticed something, and placing her elbows on the table, she leaned forward.

"Your face tells me there's been a lot going on. How should I put it, would it offend you if I said you wear a solemn expression? You've become very mature. Much more than you were in middle school. There must have been something."

She whispered in a hushed voice, and resumed her original position.

I heard the chair creak as she returned to her seat.

There was no time for my heart to speed up.

"But I won't ask."

"Hashimoto."

"Know what, tell me your address."

"Eh?"

Unable to keep up with the speed of this unfolding conversation, I replied with my mouth hanging open.

"We haven't moved."

"Move? No, I meant your cell phone number and mail address. I'll mail you, so save mine too. What kind do you have? A blue one, am I right?[\[3\]](#)" "Ohh, that. You'll have to ask Murata then, because I don't have a cell phone."

"You don't?!"

I used to, before it got drenched in water and became useless.

She placed a bright pink device on the white table cloth.

The strap and assorted accessories spread out like an umbrella.

"Unbelievable! Then there's no choice but to call your house if I need to contact you? Wow, this is so surreal, I don't think I've called anyone at their homes this past three years. I might just hang up in surprise if the parent picks up the phone."

"Well, yeah, so call Murata - the call usually gets through."

"What's with that?"

Aimlessly flipping the cell phone open and close, Hashimoto knitted her slender eyebrows together, as if at loss.

"Why don't you buy one? Isn't it inconvenient? Since we're going out and all, it's okay when we're together, but I want to be able to text you mail when we're apart."

"We can just meet up... wait a sec!! We're going out?! When was that decided?"

"But Shibuya-kun, do you have a girlfriend at the moment?"

I shook my head with all my might.

Of course I don't.

No sane guy would come alone to his friend's school festival if they did.

My brain ceased all cognitive functions at this sudden turn of events.

At once, blood rushed to my head.

Returning with the Mysterious Object on a plate, Murata Ken imposed himself on the conversation.

"This is between us, ma'am. Shibuya-kun's been spurned only 2 months ago~"

"You can't say things like that about me, Murata!"

Hashimoto Asami's voice became relieved, and she lightly squeezed her white hands.

"Great! I'm also single. So get a cell phone, even a pre-paid one will do! I'll go with you and help you choose! That reminds me, Shibuya-kun, do you use internet? If you have an e-mail address..."

"Er, I do go to sites for baseball, but it's always under my dad's or my brother's name."

"Wow, you lead a very peaceful life."

For the fact that I couldn't tour those sites that adults enjoy, it sure was an immensely healthy internet life.

Fiddling with the phone strap, Hashimoto turned the camera lens on me.

"The internet is fun. You get to know more people, and though you don't know their faces, you make a lot of friends with whom you can chat. I'm exchanging email with an American student. Her name is Abby, Abigail Graves."

"In English? That's amazing."

"Oh, not really", she denied waving her hands, and checked the time on her cell phone display.

"She's coming to visit Japan... oh no, it's already 3'o clock."

"Three?"

Was that a request for deserts?

If that's the case, there's [Forest Bear-san's handmade Mysterious Object] steaming right there.

"The 'Miss Contest' will start soon. We need to hurry to the auditorium. Eh, didn't you come for that Shibuya-kun? You'll be surprised, some of them are really cute!"

I say this just to be safe, but there are only guys in Murata's school.

A guys-only Miss Contest is a festival event particular to an all-male academy.

But since I've already seen and met lots of spectacularly beautiful men – such as the uber-beuty and stubborn pretty boy – the merit of the event is lost on me.

"I'll pass. I've something else to do."

"Okay, then we can meet back here at 5'o clock. Let's walk home together."

Turning her back to my vague reply, Hashimoto hurried out of the classroom.

At the doorway she looked back and waved her small hand.

Her lips mouthed 'See you later'.

I was balancing the chair on the hind legs, and subsequently, almost toppled backwards.

"Sir~~ your bills~"

Murata who'd been going through the customers' plates uninvited, flaunted the bill in front of my eyes.

However I had no time for such things.

Just now, I might have entered my first phase of popularity for the very first time in my life.

With a nice and decent person of the opposite sex. A real girl the same age as me.

"W-wha-what do you think Murata?"

With a force enough to rip off one of the apron's ribbons, I demanded an answer from my friend.

"Just what is opening this gate to a rosy prospect? God? Is this some mistake of God? Not that I'm in a position to be turning to God, but still!"

Murata sat down in the chair opposite me.

"Calm down, Shibuya. Hey, I thought you were cool with this, were you in fact desperately covering it up? Now, now - don't get so over-excited. Good for you! Go out with her! You've been down lately with this and that; it should be a good change."

"You shouldn't drag a girl into things for your own convenience!"

"Drag in? She was the one who brought it up."

For a second I almost agreed with my friend's level-headed observation.

"Er, since you put it that way... um, and I don't think I recall being confessed to. ARGH-- I don't know if Hashimoto likes me or not!!!"

"No one would ask out a person they didn't like."

Images of suspense drama series swirled though my mind.

Helper lady-san, could you check it out for me? And tell me what has actually happened[\[4\]](#).

"She-she is after my valuables....."

"Oh yeah, that makes sense, she's after your baseball collection.

Sure, sure-that's exactly what she needs. The disappointing Central-league-only baseball cards, and the old worn out spike."

Oy, what's with that 'Que sera sera' attitude.

"But you know what Shibuya?"

From the coffee pot he'd brought over, my friend began to pour into my left over milk cup.

I took a sip from the lukewarm caffee au lait.

"Sometimes it's better to fool around and have bucket loads of fun, and get rid of the glumness quick. If it'll take your mind off things, going out with Hashimoto is definitely an option. I always knew you were single-minded, but this recent bout of blues is odd, even for you."

"It's 'cause the baseball season is over..."

"You know that's not it."

His glasses seemed to flicker and shine.

"Ever since the 2nd semester began, you've been acting distant. You're not half as enthusiastic about baseball practices as before. Sometimes you gaze at the oddest places with an anxious glint in your eyes. Ponds and fountains. Try putting yourself in the place of a person who has to fret over the possibility of his friend jumping into the fountain by the station. From what I heard, you've taken up visiting bathhouses as a hobby. Your mother told me you shoved a leg down the toilet at your house, the other time."

That... was because I had some reservations about putting my head in.

Murata downed the contents of the cup in one go, and then wrote 'Coffee 1' on the slip.

Wait just a-you intend to have me pay for this?!

"Oy, why do I have to pay for..."

"I understand you're concerned with the issues over there, but unless you learn to draw a line between things, this will only harm your body and mind. As you were originally born on earth, you need to relax and enjoy life while you're here, and replenish your spiritual energy. Otherwise you'll burn out later. It's like planet Plankton for Superman. Er, or was it planet Eric Clapton^[5]? Anyhow, I invited you to my school so you could shake off that blues and cheer up a little."

In a serious tone much different from his usual, Murata added.

"Even so, you're here today in search of a probable 'start point', right?"

Nothing goes unnoticed by the legendary Great Sage.

Spreading all five fingers out, I rubbed both of my palms on the table cloth.

Beneath my fingers I felt the rough fabric crumple.

"I'm sorry! Sorry! It's just like you said. I didn't come for the festival. Neither for the guys-only Miss Contest. I've long given up on the illusions of beauties. I came to search - especially since this is your school, I thought it'd have a link to there."

Bowing my head slightly, I opened my eyes to look up.

Faced with an unfamiliar stern face, I carefully glanced into Murata's eyes.

It's a mesmerizing black color.

From the mirror reflections I couldn't tell, but were my eyes like that, too?

"And, this might just be the last fortress.[\[6\]](#)"

"Last fortress?"

Murata looked at me like a elementary school nurse would.

It was difficult to tell whether he was perturbed or baffled from the expression on his face.

Then, after blinking once, he threw his head back and stared up into the sky.

"Fortress is more about defense though... Ah well, I'd guessed it was all about this. Follow me. Most of the students are at the auditorium now, so the pool should be empty."

"You'll take me there?!! Thanks, sure good to have an understanding friend."

"But in exchange-"

Lightly smacking my cheeks, my friend stood up with new found vitality.

Do you know that that is a courtship ritual in Shinmakoku?

"Shibuya, don't forget that you called it the 'last fortress'. A man don't go back on his words, so make this the last time, okay? Even if we have to get back soon, if the pool doesn't work this time, then you must give up and rest for the time being. Promise?"

"Yeah."

It's not like there are any other places that I can think of.

If this fails, it's The End.

As expected there was no one at the autumn pool.

All the students and visitors seemed to have gathered at the auditorium for the Miss Contest.

There was no sight of anyone anywhere in the school yard.

We passed through the open gate and walked up the dry concrete steps.

Withered brown ginko leaves were scattered over the chipped tiles.

"It's not so much the matter of place though..."

"Then what is it? Tell me, you are the Great Sage after all."

Murata genially shrugged with his shoulders.

"Weeell, let's give it a go. If it makes you happy."

"Ri~ght, I'll do that now, I'm getting to it... Wow, this is great! There's still clean water here. Ah, prep academy, your school's rich-- Eh? Murata, there's something posted here."

About 10 sheets of paper were plastered on the fence encircling the water filled pool.

The notice was written with brush in light water-color, in a commanding style.

"Water, swimming, men, synchroni... This isn't a poems contest... Ah this word here is in hiragana. Water0Boys... Water0Boys, what is this?"

"Seems to me like a poster - Oh!"

Murata - being a student of this school - seemed to have remembered something.

Suddenly, a loud booming siren rang - followed by a background music for sports - from the speakers.

The volume was turned up so loud that the high notes crackled.

"Wha-what's happening? Earthquakes, thunder and bearded old men?!!!"

"Shibuya, you're afraid of beards^[7]?"

As we stood there flabbergasted, a swimming team appeared sans socks on cue to the music. A half nude trio who held their heads high, plus a coach clad in track suit.

The team consisted of one very thin, one very large and one medium built person, strangely well balanced.

If there was one thing unusual, it was the fact that... the team members were all old men.

"Er.."

"Damn it. I didn't think this event would be taking place now."

Their eyes trained on a confused me and a disgruntled Murata, the men lined up on the other side.

As the tracksuit-clad coach blew the whistle, the three twisted their old bodies to form a pose of the katakana [ク](ku).

"We are the lively Old Boys!!!"

"Principal."

"School master."

"Vice-principal."

So they aren't the Kishimashi Grandpas^[8].

That 'O', wasn't a zero but an 'O'.

Red swim caps and red swimming shorts.

Wait a sec, I thought the outline of the shorts was a little too clearly defined, yet it was neither a bikini nor a thong, but a swimming fundoshi from the old days^[9]!!!????

Feeling the cold concrete beneath the soles of my feet, I whispered to Murata.

"Still, why are they doing this Water-fundoshi-Boys thing now? Spring's long since ended."

"The chairman of the board is from a school where Men's synchronized swimming began, that's why. But since no one joins the swimming club in a prep school like ours, this is the end result of attempting to keep up the show through willpower."

"Yeeeess--- Visitors, are you enjoying yourself today?"

You're reading it off the scripts.

A bleary script reading for the two of us, who've by an unfortunate turn of things, have become involuntary observers.

As they began their repertoire, the music changed to an up-beat tune, and the principal-school master-vice principal trio hurled themselves into the water.

There is no warm-up, even though it's this cold.

In time to the dreary whistling of the coach, they lifted their muscled legs or floated their chubby stomach.

Something red - either the fundoshi or the swim cap - moved, displaying quite the eroticism of the event.

"I don't know why, but Murata, tears are clouding my vision."

"Me too. Aahh, it's [Inugami Ichizoku].[\[10\]](#)"

It was after the three had performed a few synchronized moves, and had dived under water together.

On both sides, the heads of the guy who was too thin and the prodigious man broke the water surface right away, but the middle-height, middle-sized man in the middle of the 50m pool did not rise, even after a count of ten.

"School master, the vice principal hasn't come up?!!"

"What did you say, Principal?!! The vice *fshoot-* puwincipwual 'az-"

He was speaking funny.

His dentures must have fallen out with that shooting sound.

"Vice principal!!!"

"Uwaahhh!!"

"Pi--- Pi--- Pu-----!!!"

The last sound was a whistle.

Thrashing their arms and legs, the principal and school master struggled in an attempt to reach their sinking fellow.

But because of their age, they didn't quite manage.

They were wailing about swallowing water, and getting cramps in their legs.

The coach by the pool had turned white and stumbled to the floor, whistle still in his mouth.

"What do we do Murata?! This is an emergency! They should have followed the normal routine! This is what happens when you swim without warming up!"

I threw away my uniform jacket, and kicked off the diving board.

The target is a fragile old man. If he's not rescued in time, his life will be in danger.

I completely forgot the things like the cold and chill, or the fact that I hadn't done any warm-up myself.

Diving into this light blue world, holding my breath, I saw a flailing medium built man near the bottom. He was gurgling foam from his mouth.

It's not too late. In two strokes I reached the vice-principal.

Was I this good at swimming?

Weaving my arms around the thrashing body, I anchored my hands under his armpit and laboriously hauled him upwards.

I felt the tension of the surface, and the vice-principal burst out into the open.

"Yeeeeessss!!! Lift accomplished!!!"

This ain't a lift!

The team mates, who'd managed to walk over to us, caught the vice-principal's shoulders.

What the-you can stand in this pool?!!

In order to give them a piece of my mind, I attempted to stand up on my heels.

But.

"Ack"

The bottom of the pool had vanished under my feet.

The rough light blue tiles were gone.

Not only that, but my whole body is pulled under as if there was a suction pipe below.

My resisting ankles were being dragged away by a strong chilling force.

As I panicked, I accidentally swallowed water.

But then, I realized.

Maybe - no, not maybe, but finally - my chance had come?

At the end of all hope, hanging on that one last possibility, I have succeeded in finding the one thing I needed the most.

Sinking into the chlorine-smelling water, I noticed Murata shouting something.

Oh-he wanted me to recuperate.

But I can't, they're calling me. And I wanted to return, as soon as I could.

I'll rest, I promise.

The next time I return, I'll do that for sure.

It's all right, I'm confident in my stamina, and rather than agonizing over something in my head, I prefer facing things head on.

Meeting difficulties face-to-face doesn't mean that I'll break.

Feeling like striking a pose of victory, I was sucked into that world overflowing with white and blue.

Next up is the long awaited Star Tours.

No doubt, I'll get to where they are.

References[edit]

- ↑ Maido as in 'Maido arigatou gozaimasu', meaning 'Thank you again for coming'. It sounds like 'maid' pronounced by the Japanese.

2. ↑ The title character in the manga of same name. The manga follows the business success of the titular character, who is also very popular with women.
3. ↑ In Japan there is a mail address for cell phones through which you receive and send text messages.
4. ↑ From a Japanese mystery drama called 'The Helper lady knows!'
5. ↑ Murata is trying to say planet Krypton and failing, for those not familiar to comics.
6. ↑ 'Last fortress' an expression in Japanese that means last chance/option.
7. ↑ It is said that the three things Japanese fear most are earthquakes, thunders and old men.
8. ↑ Kishimasi Musume - a comedy trio consisting of three very old ladies.
9. ↑ Fundoshi is undergarment used in pre-modern Japan.
10. ↑ Inugami Ichizoku - a mystery novel, in which a victim is found dead submerged in the water, with only his feet sticking upwards.

Chapter 2

You know what Yuu-chan? Mama gets the feeling that Yuu-chan's pheromone level is on the decline recently. Not Doraemon, nor 21emon^[1] but pheromone.

They say the girls will come flocking to you, if you have lots of it!

So starting from today, Mama is going to cook pheromone specialties everyday for the sake of Yuu-chan's popularity! Oh no, no need to thank me!! What is crucial in both diet and rehabilitation, is the will to succeed and the support of the family!

We begin tonight! Look here, this is Pheromone Specialty No.7!

Liver delicacies and beef tripe stew~ coming right up~!

"Urgh... mom... that's 'hormone'^[2]..."

Not to mention that with 7 different ingredients, the smell resembled something out of this world. An odor reminiscent of the incident attacked my nose, and I snapped my eyes open instantaneously. Some record breaking recovery time.

"Wha-what's this..... urgh!!!"

My eyes are stinging.

My lungs feel as if they're being polluted by the air I inhaled. My consciousness is swimming in and out of reach again. Ignoring the pain I looked around, but the darkness made it difficult to tell where I was.

Just a moment before, I was standing inside a pool at my friend's school fair. The late October wind was a little chilling, but the afternoon sky was clear and blue. Now however, the sky is dark and the smell so foul that it is impossible to

breathe.

The world seems different.

Very, very different.

Which could only mean one thing.

"Am I back?"

Was I successful? Have I finally managed to return?!!!

"Yeah I did it! I finally came ba-- Ouch!!"

While jumping to my feet in joy, I banged my head into something. The ceiling here was very low. Not that I had many to begin with, but the shock just now probably killed 80% of what little brain cells I had.

I'd thought it was a bit cold; it turned out my back and pants were all soaked.

And it was not even clean water, but some disgusting gooey liquid flowing slowly across my legs. Very annoying. Inferring from the smell and the narrow space, this here is probably the sewer, explaining the pitch-darkness.

Keeping in mind that this was a sewer, I concentrated my efforts on seeing - and it turned out it wasn't so completely dark as I thought. In the distance I could see a spot of light, maybe that was the exit. Then I realized I was enclosed in a circle by a large number of small beady red eyes.

Are-are these rats?!!

"Woah--!! Tokidoki Rat World^[3]!!!"

My muscles tensed.

You couldn't find this many rats even in the dream world in Urayasu^[4]. Not only are they all over the ground, but there are also several hanging on the ceiling too. Apparently some of them have wings.

To inform them of my non-resistance, I raised my hands next to my face.

This time I stood up slowly as to not bump my head into anything.

By now I've gotten used to the dimension-crossing Star Tours, and I can deal with being landed in the most embarrassing situations. But this is just too much.

A smelly sewer inhabited by rats and bats, this is the worst ever. Like a lost child, I know that it's safest not to wander away from the landing point and to wait for people to come and find me. However, in an unbearable environment like this, I can't just stay put and wait.

Because there's definitely some kind of gas leaking here.

Dunno if it's methane or butane, but if someone was to light a match here, the manhole cover will fly off... or rather, would be blasted away.

Nope, I can't even think of jokes to cheer myself on.

This is really serious.

In order to make my escape quick, I began to move forward little by little.

Unless I want to join the ranks of rats and bats, I need to calculate my moves carefully.

Darn, if Doraemon was here right now, he'd gladly have his ears bitten instead of mine^[5].

"Help me Muraemon^[6]~~ Wait, where's Murata?!!"

Even though they were with me at the moment of Star Tours, I know from experience that the principle - school master - vice principle trio haven't been dragged over to this world.

The everyday bystander is not to be involved - that is the rule of Star Tours.

But Murata Ken's different. He is definitely an involved party.

Hell, his association with this world runs far deeper than my own.

He was flung along the last time, so there's a chance he was swallowed up by the whirlpool too. If he is out there cold, I can't leave him behind. But it was still too dark. In this darkness, there was no other way but to feel him out with my hands and feet.

"Murata... you there? Answer me if you are!

Yes, if you're here; no, if you're not~"

"Heee~~ hiii~~"

I heard a weird moaning sound coming from somewhere near my feet.

"Wa-was that a 'yes', or a 'no? Make your answer cleaar!!"

"Hiii~~ hee~~"

I can't tell whether you're there or not, from just 'hiii~~hee~~'.

"Well, I guess that's closer to a 'no'. I'll take it that you're not here and move on, okay?"

.....is not what I should do as a decent human being.

"Hii~~ hee~~"

The answer sounded more like rasping breath than an actual voice. Maybe the gas had done something to his throat.

Moving my right foot forward a bit, my toes came into contact with something warm. I picked it up using my thumb and index finger - it was sleek, no, very slippery to the touch.

Keeping distance from the red eyes encircling me, I searched with my hands.

Legs.

Two human legs bent like scythe.

"Murata?!!! Why did you take off your pants?"

Last I saw you, you still had your uniform on...

Right, this isn't the time for this.

First we have to get out from this hellhole of a sewer somehow.

Because it was so dark that I couldn't tell where his head was, I pulled him up by the ankles. Dragging him onto my back, I began to pave through the darkness, careful not to agitate the small guys who were declaring their presence by the blinking of red eyes.

I prayed for the white light far ahead to be our escape.

O the fragrant and benevolent god of the sewers, give us light!!!

Finally, with the sound of flowing water, the white spot gradually grew bigger.

The air around me became fresh, and the breeze was warm from the sunlight.

From a distance I heard the voices of people. They were calling my name.

A clear ringing voice of a boy, and a ghastly shriek that ruined the naturally beautiful voice.

"Where are you Yuuri!!!"

"Your Majest-----y!! Your Majesty, where are you---!!! I, von Kleist Gunter, will run to your side this instant-----!! Aah, I remember, the first time I saw Your Majesty was at a village near the borders. Ever since that day I have been your captive, and my heart, like that of a 70 years old maiden, has nurtured reverence for Your Majesty..."

"Shut up Gunter, don't go babbling about yourself!!!!"

This natural gag comedy duo is Wolfram and Gunter.

I felt the weight lifted off my shoulders, and my footsteps got lighter.

The brick-built sewer ended here, the grey sewage-water spilling into a small river. There was a small embankment, next to which a lake was sparkling in the sunlight. Nearby there were several benches and boats. So it seemed to be a park of some kind.

Which is to say this is Shinmakoku Sewage Park?

The stench is too awful for it to be a picnic spot.

But, that makes it safe to have fried dumplings for lunch^[7].

"I'm here--!!!"

I walked into the sunlight and shouted to them who were standing below me.

The overprotective tutor and self-proclaimed fiancée both turned their heads at my shout.

One was examining the swan boat while the other was ransacking through the contents of a waste bin. They were, in their own ways, doing their bests to locate me.

I take offence at their choice of search spots though.

"Am I a trash of some kind or something...."

"Yuuri!"

"Your Majesty!"

Familiar face, familiar voice; the two came running towards me.

Lord von Bielefeld Wolfram's golden locks were shining under the sunlight. His emerald green eyes reminiscent of a lake, are trained on me. From the half open lips, I can almost hear the words 'Welcome back'.

Ahh, I've finally come back. According to Earth time I've only been away for 2 months, but I've really missed this place.

"I'm back Gunter, Wolfram...."

"You're late bimp!!!"

Wait a sec.

Just now instead of 'Welcome', did you say wimp?

Not only that but, you mispronounced it, didn't you?

The tension broke with an almost audible snap, and the energy drained out of my body.

"...is that how you greet someone who's just returned? Thankfully, Murata here on my back is also... yikes! Sorry Murata, I dropped you!!"

The load on my back fell to my feet, creating an elaborate splash of sewage-water.

Lord von Kleist pointed behind me excitedly and exclaimed.

"What rare occurrence! A Mer-princess!"

'Scuse me?

Since when was it that my friend came to be called a 'princess'?

Dumbfounded, I looked down and saw that the thing rolling in the shallow stream of water was not human, but a tuna with human legs. It was beating the water with its tail-fin.

Very fresh.

On the place of a head is a fish-face, complete with gills.

"Uwah!! Muraken, what happened to you!!!! Legs!!! There're legs on this fish!!!"

"Your Majesty, that is because she is a Mer-princess, an aristocrat of the ocean.

Of course in this case, 'princess' doesn't refer to her birth; all the males are called 'king' and the females 'princess.' They are loyal subjects of Shin Makoku and to Your Majesty, so you need not worry yourself over having called them 'fish.'"

I sincerely apologize for mistaking you for a tuna.

"Mer-princess instead of Mermaid.... Eh? How'd you know she's a princess?"

"That is simple, she has beautiful legs. As Your /highness can see, no leg hair."

Said the tutor, proudly.

"Hmph, Yuuri, you sure are a wimp. How can you not know the proper way to hold a Mer-princess? Watch, this is how a gentleman should hold a lady."

With those words, what Wolfram demonstrated was the 'take a photo with your catch' pose.

If you call that romantic, all the fishers who've caught big catches would qualify as certified gentlemen.

I entered the back gates of the castle still drenched in sewage; even the horse was turning its head away from me.

That I'd appeared in the sewer was top-secret, so there were no soldiers making fuss over my arrival. Though it'd been a while, Blood Pledge Castle was as majestic as always, and I could almost hear the imaginary orchestra playing music in the background.

"Yuuri!!! Yuuri, I missed you!!!"

“Greta!!! I missed you too my cute angel!!!!... eh?”

I squatted down and waited to embrace the small brightly smiling figure running towards me.

“Yuu.... stinks!!!”

The lovely girl halted midway and pinching her nose, took one step backwards. Daughters sure are merciless.

“What happened Yuuri?!! It’s like your body’s rotting away.”

“I’m not decomposing.”

The girl with sun-tanned wheat-colour skin and wavy reddish-brown hair relaxed her creased brows, and hugged me.

“But I still like you anyhow!!!”

“Oof.”

I was taken aback by her enthusiasm and fell on my backside, hitting a bone. Yet it didn’t hurt. What’s a bone or two, so as long as my darling daughter loves me?

“Eeh, you really stink. Even so, it’s okay! Bad smell is nothing against love. Greta’s love won’t change even if Yuuri rots away and becomes a zombie!!!”

“But I’m not rotting!!!”

“No, but really.”

This girl from foreign lands, who’d become my adopted daughter through certain circumstances, pressed her head to my clothes, not the least bothered with her hair getting wet.

“....I was worried. You disappeared into thin air. I... I thought I’d never see you again... like mother... and Greta would be all alone.”

Her delicate shoulders were shaking.

Oh the treachery!

Making a child cry!

Shibuya Yuuri Idiot Harajuku Fuuri, you worthless person!!!

Say you're sorry, get down on your knees and apologise to Greta!

I wrapped my arms around the warm body, and held her tight.

"I'm sorry Greta, it's all my fault. Never again will I do such a dange..."

I halted, swallowing the half formed words.

Could I honestly promise her that I wouldn't be reckless in the future, even when facing a decision of great consequences?

Greta must have sensed my hesitation, and she did her best to put on a bright smile.

"I don't believe you---. You say that, but Yuuri's going to disappear again. It's okay, Greta's gotten used to it. I don't fret over it too much anymore."

"I really, really am sorry."

"It's fine. Yuuri being safe is enough for me. Even if you scare me by disappearing, it's okay as long as you come back."

"Yeah."

"But, still I think that..."

Out of nowhere, she lowered her tone and whispered.

"....that I don't want to let go of you tonight."

"Whaaattt----!!!!??!!"

Who-Who taught Greta such an indecent thing to say!!!!

I think the shock just blew a hole in my chest.

Coughing vehemently, I apologized.

You meant 'this time', not 'tonight' right? Right?

(Cough) "G-Greta.... I'm sorry for worrying you, but...."

"But Father, we've promised to leave those words unspoken - thus Greta cannot but cry herself to sleep."

Unsettled, I looked upwards, and noticed the third son raising his thumb.

"Wolf!!! Is this your doing?! There's nothing 'Nice' about this!!!!"

"Nope, this is a signal for 'once more.' However cold a king may be, such words from his beloved daughter must surely be enough to persuade him to scatter his bones in this country."

Is scattering bones the norm in Shin Makoku[\[8\]](#)?

Accompanied by hurried footsteps, a tall man stepped into the room. The baritone spoke out tersely when he noticed me lying on the floor with Greta attached to me.

"I see you've arrived."

"Gwendal."

Thank to the pervasive stench he seemed to have caught on, but instead of pinching his nose or holding his breath, he simply added another wrinkle to his brow, his expression unchanging. He was probably used to this sort of smell, from undergoing certain experiments.

Indeed, a man like him who presides over others would be in a league of his own.

From his mouth came the words of rationality as usual.

"Wat habbend, diz sdench."

Wha-, you-you stopped breathing with your nose.

Even I'm a little hurt, when greeted with such avoidance.. And I'm supposedly dense.

"Oh Your Highness, do not make such a distressed face. The stench of sewage is nothing! As an evidence, I, Gunter am perfectly fine."

"..... You, you have a nose bleed."

The bleeding is a far greater threat to you, than my sewage smell.

"You guys have issues with coordination, I tell you..."

It's not that I mind being called back - after all, I am the King, ain't I?

Just that, could you fix that wormhole to someplace permanently? I'd really like to land in a more normal and safe spot you know!!!"

"Sowy abowt det yor eighess."

Gwendal mumbled, looking not in the least apologetic.

There's always a depth to Gwendal's 'Your Highness.'

Even when it's spoken in a nasal voice.

The eldest of the 'in fact-quite-alike' Mazoku Three Brothers does not have complete faith in me. I don't think he'd try to get rid of me, but unlike his two younger brothers and the zealous tutor, he never shows me reverence as one would to a king.

Well, it's not that I want to be treated like royalty with etiquette and all that stuff.

But, I do wish he'd trust me a little more.

To you, I might still be nothing more than a simpleton, easy to control and just as easy to replace.

Yet now, having lost a trustworthy ally, I need the trust of everyone on my side.

Though for sure I'd get harsh comments on just how immature that line of thought is.

That was why I was startled when he took my right hand into his, bowing his head.

Sir Gwendal von Voltaire spoke up, his face solemn and devoid of ridicule.

"I had not the opportunity in Caloria, so let me express my relief and gladness on your safe return. And of the incident concerning Sir Weller... I ask for your forgiveness in place of my foolish brother.

I am prepared to accept whatever punishment you bestow."

"...Er..."

Even more than me, it was the youngest brother, Wolfram, who'd gone all white and freaked out as if he was about to scream, 'What has happened to you, Gwen!'

No wonder. That, just now, was a statement of apology. A bit high-handed,

but still, him asking for forgiveness from a wimp like me was unexpected, given how he is normally.

The one feeling at unease is, however, me - the one who was being apologized to.

It's not like I have any intention of putting the blame on the eldest, being pressed for judgment.

I couldn't think of anything to say, so I ended up giving my thoughts on the situation.

"It's tough being the eldest, huh."

Gwendal quirked his eyebrow and let go of my hand, expression odd.

His voice low and shrewd as always.

"What I wish to request is a temporary moratorium. The crimes of Conrart, who has fled to enemy lands disregarding his duty to protect the king, and of myself, having been unable to prevent this from happening, are severe. I understand that no half-done punishment would appease your anger."

"Wait, I never said anything about you being responsib..."

"However, currently our country is in a diplomatic crisis. We have called for you because of this emergency. It is not that I wish to delay the verdict, but the matter of the country is urgent..."

"Now hold on!!! Listen to me Gwen!!! I told you, I don't think any of this is your fault. I wasn't even thinking about punishing you. As for Conrad..."

I spoke the name, as if swallowing something especially bitter.

"Whichever country he goes to, whatever he does... that's his own choice. If he is intent on changing jobs, that's just that. I don't have any right to stop him. Eh, that is to say, freedom of occupation? I'm saying the right thing, right? Right?"

Like freedom of academia or freedom of religion or Lady Freedom (Statue of Liberty).

I racked my limited vocabulary in search for a suitable word.

Lord von Voltaire attempted to speak, but I cut into his words and continued.

"In fact, I'm the one who should be apologising. In Caloria... in Shimaron too, I'm sorry for acting on my own accord. You're angry... no, you're probably very mad--... but I had no choice. There was no other way. I know, I know, it was dangerous and thoughtless and all that. What you say is right. I'm sorry!! I'll sit through your lecturing!!"

"I already got the scolding."

Wolfram put his hands up in exasperation. His brow was creased in the exact same place as his brother's.

"The incident in Caloria was my and Grier's fault for not stopping you. Don't bring it up anymore. I do not want to remember it."

I imagined the last-born son being reprimanded in mid-low stereo tone, caught between two tall men. I couldn't help but laugh a little, despite the direness of the situation.

"And, for making you send out a rescue team... that... I didn't think it'd become such a big mess. You had to spend a lot of money, right? How much does it cost to get a helicopter?

Making you send out a boat... Uwahh just how much tax have I wasted? I'm really sorry. I'm such an amoeba."

"Oh, no, Your Majesty----," wailed Gunter.

He must have been so angry that he couldn't find his words; the handsome guy stood silently with his mouth still open.

Because of my obstinacy, a hideous portion of the national budget seemed to have gone to waste. I guessed my head-bowing apology was nowhere near sufficient.

".... but thanks for coming for me..."

By the way, I'm kinda late in asking, but, what happened to that nasty box?"

On cue to the question, everyone raised their heads and the atmosphere changed in an instant.

While barely escaping from Big Shimaron, we managed to swap the 'box' with a fake one and had the real one brought back with us.

In this world there are four things that should never be touched.

One of them, was the box we had taken, ‘The End of the Wind.’

Traveling through Caloria it was definitely in our possession, but for me who was Star Tour-ed away in the ship’s kitchen, the box’s final whereabouts was still a mystery.

Lord von Voltaire reverted to his usual solemn expression, his tone also returning to the usual commandeering one. Seeing him acting his usual self was quite reassuring.

“We are holding an important meeting concerning the matter. A round table meeting; and Your Majesty’s presence is required. However you probably do not wish to present yourself in your current condition. Hurry up and wash yourself!!! Make use of this stench remover ‘Not-stinky-anymore-kun’ Anissina left behind.”

“Not-stinky-anymore-kun?!!!”

That name surely sounded dangerous, but I could feel the love in the attached suffix ‘-kun’.

Pushing me into the bath, the eldest brother muttered in a tortured voice.

“The talks are already on the roll.”

References[edit]

1. ↑ ‘Doraemon’ and ‘21emon’ are mangas from the same manga artist. Pun on how the two titles rhyme with ‘pheromone’.
2. ↑ The Japanese word for cooked intestine (of cows and pigs) is pronounced as ‘hormone’. Originally it stood for ‘things to be thrown out’. Pun on how it rhymes with ‘pheromone’.
3. ↑ ‘Tokidoki’ is an onomatopoeia for the sound of heart beats. Also used to emphasize anticipation or anxiety. Yuuri’s parodying Disney Land, in

reference to Mickey Mouse most probably.

4. ↑ Urayasu is the area where Tokyo Disney Land is located. ‘Dream world’ is referring to Disney Land.
5. ↑ Doraemon is the cat-looking robot from a manga of the same name. It is said that he lost his ears when a mouse bit them off.
6. ↑ Murata+Doraemon.
7. ↑ Apparently, Japanese fried dumplings smell of garlic, which gives you bad breath.
8. ↑ The expression, ’to bury one’s bones (somewhere)’ has the meaning that the person is permanently settling down in that place of choice. The Shin Makoku counterpart to this expression seems to be ‘scattering’ instead of ‘burying’.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

The meeting is indeed underway.

When I heard that it's a round table meeting, stupid old me immediately thinks of Mom's favorite story, about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Come to think of it, there was even a guy in my middle school art society named 'Arthur'[\[1\]](#).

I'm seated in the middle of a donut-shaped table, surrounded by Mazoku I only said hi to during my coronation. And every time someone is introduced, the table would turn so I faced said person. Although the table is round, it feels more like the Lazy Sues in Chinese restaurants, albeit the part spinning isn't the center but the sides.

If it keeps spinning I'm sure I'll get crazy dizzy—it feels like I'm suddenly the heart of a clock. And I'm the only one in the center, everyone's gazes piercing me so sharply it really hurts.

"I-is this some sort of punishment game?"

I clench my fists on my knees. Logically speaking I should be more used to the spinning by now, but my armpits are drenched in a cold sweat. Anissina moves 60 degrees to face me, her slightly elevated sapphire eyes narrowed,

"Your Majesty. What happened to your hair?"

"It was sucked by 'The Great Demon Odor Remover, Stinky Go Away-kun', and became this SPP corn head."[\[2\]](#)

The woman who bet her entire life on finding the ways to incorporate magic into daily life, the forever experimenting, experimenting, then experimenting again Lady von Karbelnikoff, is also one of Shin Makoku's Three Great Majou, and presently she reveals a smile that can rival the Sexy Queen Lady Cheri.

"Heavens, Your Majesty personally tested that prototype? I'm extremely honored, and would you please fill in the user survey form? Oh, yes, and would

you want to try the new and improved ‘Stinky Go Away-kun’ 16 as well?”

“...I appreciate your good intentions.”

Thanks for the free test drive.

According to the previous introductions, the ones around the table are the Ten Noble Families, the representative from ten places, or you could say they’re the representatives chosen in full authority by the people.

The one from the von Voltaire lands in Lord von Voltaire Gwendal, and Lord von Christ Günter from the von Christ territories is here too. On his left is the passionate young Lord von Wincott, the temporary head of the von Spitzberg clan and representative of the von Bielefeld city —Lord von Bielefeld Wolfram, and Anissina with full authority from Lord von Karbelnikoff Densham. Next to her is the soldier from Radford who can barely keep his distance from the table. Lord Rochefort and Lord Gyllenhaal are there too, but I can’t remember their names. It’s already really impressive that I can remember nine of them at once.

As for the seat supposedly occupied by a member of the von Grantz family, for some reason there’s a big bear baby. Did that person say something he shouldn’t have?

There are other nobles besides the highest representatives, seated by the wall away from the round table, including some familiar faces. I even see some women amongst them.

Günter, maintaining a respectful manner, clears his throat and spreads open a light green paper,

“Then, Your Majesty, before the meeting begins, allow me to first read the reports from the absentees. Um—Congratulations, Your Majesty, on today’s meeting, I sincerely wish the 27th Maou-heika, may you be healthy and may all your wishes come true. I cannot attend the glorious event due to circumstances, and offer my deepest apologies. On my inability to beg for forgiveness personally in front of Your Majesty, I am frustrated beyond words. Unfortunately I slipped and fell into my rear on a rainy day in the stables, causing myself to be covered in hay and horse excrement, and even worse, being trampled on by a horse and thus losing consciousness... Um, that... I will skip the details, and move on the next part. And so I sincerely wish that this imperial meeting will run smoothly, I

and the chicken on my knee will be praying that the white team wins.”

Anissina gnaws her tongue lightly.

After reading a few more letters, Günter —who I assume is the speaker— suddenly announces the beginning of the meeting. As a gong resounds throughout the room, everybody stands in unison. I try hastily to get to my feet too, but before I can I hear an ear-piercing metallic sound, and then my arms and legs are locked onto the chair, just as a powerful spotlight shines onto my head.

“Eh? What is this?!”

“Our deepest apologies, Your Majesty. Due to the former Maou’s high escape record... No, I mean, her tendency to leave the meeting halfway and then proceed to vanish into thin air, from this meeting onwards, we have decided to take such measures. Although it may be slightly uncomfortable, I beg of you, please don’t mind it.”

“How can I not mind?! Anyone would mind!”

Under these circumstances, even if a metal pot falls on me from the ceiling I can’t avoid it! On that note, Lady Cheri, why can’t you hold a meeting properly?!

By the way, this special round table was also designed for the former Maou whose only looks in certain directions. This way, regardless of the beauty or otherwise of the speaker, Your Majesty has to meet their gaze and hear their opinions.”

“In other words, Lady Cheri only looked at the handsome men...”

Just what I’d expect from the huntress of love, as soon as she locks on to her target, she won’t let them escape from her line of sight. But being cuffed to the chair like this, with a bright light shining overhead, it feels less like a high level meeting and more like an interrogation by the cops...

Yamada, bring a bowl of pork chop rice! [3]

※※※※※

“This time, we are introducing a new method, to allow people from all over the country to participate in the meeting. Please watch, Your Majesty, this is the live

communication technique, made possible by gathering all our tribe's intelligence and technology. Right, raise the curtain!"

Behind the rapidly rising blinds, there's a huge hole in the wall, revealing the clear sky. Countless pigeons are resting on a ledge, and an army of kotsuhizoku are floating in mid-air. The afternoon rays shine through the skeletons, creating a scene that looks like it came straight out of hell.

"I thought there was the odor of birds, no wonder..."

"With these imperial carrier pigeons trained by trainers outsourced from companies all over the country, and the kotsuhizoku's unique telepathic abilities, we can simultaneously exchange opinions with the other party. In other words, important conference officials who can't make it here due to the short notice, can also listen in on the meeting from their respective locations, and actively offer their own ideas!"

...VIVA pigeon mail! BRAVO kohi!

Although no one understood the logic behind it, but I heard that the kotsuhizoku has some message-conveying ability. Instead of calling it bone messaging, it's better to call it bone signaling, a gift of love from the physicochemical labs.

"You could even say that whoever with any opinions need not kept them pent up, you are free to vent and freak out as you please!"

Everyone else looks completely unconcerned, ignoring the over-enthusiastic Günter. Only Lady von Karbelnikoff Anissina mutters to herself, "It'd be much easier to just use my devices."

"If you want to keep digressing, please bring it to another room, Lord von Christ. We don't have much time to lose."

"The pigeons carefully selected from all over the country... Ah, whatever... Then let's return to the matters of the conference."

Günter, who had been talking non-stop this entire time, finally sits down, and the conference officially begins.

The first few reports are about agricultural taxes, estimates on our assistance

to neighboring countries and etcetera, all matters beyond my knowledge, so my uniform answer for all of them is “deal with it appropriately”. It’s the synonym of “full authority and responsibility goes to Lord von Voltaire”, and so the older son’s frown continues to deepen.

Eventually Günter rolls up a considerable number of documents, and uses a different tone to announce the next topic.

“Then, let’s begin discussing the matter of most importance in this meeting—Shou Shimaron’s sudden diplomatic activities.”

“Shou Shimaron’s diplomatic plans?”

Despite all four of my limbs being cuffed to the chair, I immediately feel my body stiffen. So that’s it, that’s what Gwendal meant by ‘a first-rate emergency’.

Dai Shimaron and Shou Shimaron are two nearby countries ruled by a strong military force. In the war between mazokus and humans around 20 years ago, the human’s most considerable strength lay within the Shimaron army.

For someone who’s still unfamiliar with this world’s geography and history, I know this because I’ve personally been there. Not only did I meet with a terrifying disaster in Dai Shimaron, my experience in Shou Shimaron was even worse. It all began with Lady Flynn Gilbert, the iron-masked ruler of Caloria, a territory of Shou Shimaron, and the Wincott poison she retrieved from the basement of her mansion...

One thing led to another, and those people even dared to destroy a section of the land on their own accord, all because they used the wrong key to open the most brutal, most evil of final weapons—the box. Back then we had been swept into that open experiment, and were forced to come face to face with the threat of the box. It just goes to show how lucky I can be to survive that, because that dangerous situation that day was nothing short of a death-defying special event.

Anyway, be it Dai or Shou Shimaron, the world-peace supporter in me doesn’t have a good opinion of either of them. When you consider the mazoku who had endured the flames of war to get here, their feelings right now must be a couple times more complicated than mine.

“According to our intel department and reliable sources, Shou Shimaron has

been making some emergency diplomatic relations recently. From the Shin Makoku's position, we must find a way to prevent these plans, and maintain the balance in power between our countries."

"Wait a second, why must we interfere with another country's diplomatic relations? Although just thinking about Shimaron gives me a headache, but doesn't doing this equal to interfering with another country's inner workings?"

"If this matter can be resolved without our interference, that would be ideal, because we too would like to avoid any contact with the humans."

Lord von Voltaire puts his elbows on the table, lacing his fingers together before his face.

"But the situation now is simply too sudden. If their policy works, they will pose a threat to our country unlike any other. That's why, even if we have to directly interfere with their politics, we must make sure Shou Shimaron's stops this policy."

"W-what kind of scary policy is it?"

In this high school brain of mine that sucks at world history, there are only two terrifying international powers: Hitler or Hitler or Hitler... Okay, it's just one. No, it's one person that can count as three.

After clearing his throat slightly, Günter says,

"Shou Shimaron seems to be aiming to restore their relations with Seisakoku."

Hah?

"They plan on interacting actively with the country that has locked itself away from the world for two thousand years, Seisakoku."

What?

"What does that mean? Don't tell me Shou Shimaron wants to form an alliance with Seisakoku?"

"Unbelievable, these really are troubling times."

"My dear ministers, why are you still hesitating? We, the mazoku, must gather all our power right now, and teach them a lesson. We can't let the humans lead

us on any longer!"

"Seisakoku's specialty is the rainbow-colored taro, sure hope I can taste it at least once before I die~"

The room is filled with cacophony, every other mazoku aside from me unable to hide the swaying of their hearts. On that note, what kind of a place is Seisakoku?

Under the instructions of their trainers, the carrier pigeons rise into the air amidst the noisy flapping of wings; and the kotsuhizoku is one step behind, chasing them in a chorus of bone chattering. Good luck, Kohi.

While sending them encouragement that they'll never hear, I hesitantly interrupt,

"Uhm, just asking--"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"What's wrong with restoring the relations?"

"What?! Your Majesty?!"

The super bishie's expression looks shocked.

"They're just trying to actively interact with a country they never communicated with, right? In the global point of view, isn't that a really good thing? It will even improve the culture and economy of both sides. If Japan was always in a state of lockdown, I might still be wearing a bun on my head now." [4]

"You really are a wimp!"

"Mmph!"

Lord von Bielefeld's bishounen voice interrupts the low grade question by the novice who is completely oblivious to diplomatic affairs, and his tone is one of extreme, undisguised surprise.

"Using the language from the world you grew up in, you really are, through and through, a wimp KING!" [5]

"Stop it, Wolf! Stop calling me a wimp in front of all these people, and also, don't just pick up random words of English!"

What you said, does it mean ‘even though you’re a wimp, at least you’re still a king’? Or are you calling me ‘the King of rookies’? [6]

“Do you know what kind of a country Seisakoku is?”

Nope. As for things that start with the word ‘Sei’ (holy), all I can think about is the holy bible every hotel drawer must have. My stuttering must have given me away, because the former prince’s expression becomes even sterner.

“Then I’ll use this chance to tell you.”

Wolfram points at the spread-out map.

“Look closely, this is Shin Makoku, and this continent is Dai and Shou Shimaron, everything within this line...”

He sighs and continues grudgingly,

“...is Shimaron territory.”

“So big?!”

I put my hand on the map that looks like a honey cake wrapper. My finger follows the dotted line, touching the islands and continents within the boundary, and the words stating the countries’ names are sent directly to my brain.

“...Van dar Via is also Shimaron territory... Oh, yeah, Mr. Hyscliff’s land is also part of the same continent, but he’s working hard to rule it. It really is very big.”

“And then Seisakoku, is here.”

He grabs my right hand and brings it to the bottom of the map—Wolfram knows I’m not used to reading the words. The diamond-shaped land labeled Seisakoku is, in Earth terms, situated rather to the south, not too far away from the Antarctic. It’s too big for an island, but small compared to the Shimaron continent. If the area of the Shin Makoku is measured as one unit, then it would be somewhere between two point five to two point eight.

After using my pointer and thumb to trace the shape of the continent, I realize that even though the map did simplify it a bit, the other lands are differentiated with brown or green, only the diamond-shaped land underneath my fingers has nothing but the borders. I can’t see the mountains, the plains or rivers, the whole piece is just blank.

“Is it because the topography is really flat and smooth...”

“It’s because the lay of the land is currently unknown.”

As my dedicated tutor, Günter immediately rejects my guess.

“As aforementioned, Seisakoku has practiced a closed-door policy for more than two thousand years. So forget its current state, we have no idea of knowing anything about even its topography or climate. And the few merchants who are allowed to deal with said country can only enter via some pre-determined ports. Word has it that they have a small manmade island, where surveillance and security is so tight you can’t even leave without permission.”

“Just like Dejima in Nagasaki? [\[7\]](#) Or is it like Portugal?”

The discussion is becoming more and more like Nagasaki castella [\[8\]](#)... I mean, it’s slowly becoming simple enough for even an average high school student to understand.

“And to prevent the leakage of information, maps and books are highly prohibited from leaving the country. There were even people suspected and interrogated.”

“You mean, the Siebert incident.” [\[9\]](#)

“Yes, it seems they were scolded very severely.” [\[10\]](#)

“Why, Yuuri? Do you also start babbling whenever you’re scolded?”

Misunderstanding, this is a huge misunderstanding!

“Anyway, this is the reason why no one knows Seisakoku’s actual condition? But being under lockdown for two thousand years is really too impressive. In Earth terms, that’s like being sealed away from before even Christianity was founded! Just thinking about it makes me want to faint. And now that tightly sealed door will open for Shou Shimaron! I’m not wrong, am I, putting it this way?”

“Amazing, Your Majesty! Aah, Your Majesty’s brilliance always awes me to no end!”

“But...”

I move my hand away from the map, rubbing my messed-up hair.

“Restoring relations, isn’t that a good thing...?”

“Your Majesty, about that...”

Lord von Voltaire, who seems to have been holding it in for a long time, speaks up in an extremely courteous tone. As for everyone else, they’re probably reluctant to interrupt me, seeing as I’m king and all.

“We, the mazokus, have a very tense relationship with Shimaron, of this I’m sure Your Majesty is aware?”

“That I know... C’mon, Gwen, whenever you use such formalities, you make me nervous!”

“Then do you understand how dangerous it is when countries hostile to Shin Makoku try to strengthen their power? We cannot determine the extent of Seisakoku’s resources and military force, but considering the vast size of the country, we can probably estimate the reinforcements that will come with the alliance. If Shou Shimaron were to form a pact with that country, and combine their respective armies... Although I’m also unwilling, but I have to say...”

The wrinkle between his brows deepening some more, Gwandal crosses his arms in front of his chest.

“Our country’s strength alone cannot fight against them.”

There’s immediately a small riot in the room, and some people sigh. Others angrily punch the table, while the rest wordlessly stare at the ceiling. Only one person scoffs, laughing.

“What evidence do you have when you say that?”

I was wondering who could be so calm, turns out it’s Lady von Karbelnikoff Anissina, who is long used to emergency situations. Compared to an experiment gone wrong, the impact from the confession must not seem like much.

“This is from a reliable line of source...”

“What kind of line is that reliable source of yours? An electric line? A landline? Or a tasty line of noodles? Or is it your pride and joy, chosen based on their appearance and muscles, the ‘Heart skips a beat! Women-not-allowed

intelligence department members can also leak information' team?"

"Um..., our intel department doesn't just depend on their face and muscles, they are all chosen based on the strictest criteria!"

"Shut your crap! If so, then why are all the agents men with just face and no real power? And the only other members of the team are Kotsuhizokus to send messages!"

I see, so it really is like in the movies, the face really is the informant's life. This feels like the dolls you put on display during Girl's Day.

Anissina kicks aside her chair and stands up, her head tilted skyward and chin slightly raised. Although she looks small, her presence is no weaker than Gwendal's.

"Then please enlighten me, how do these informants send their reports? He says Shou Shimaron will soon rapidly expand their diplomatic relations, aiming to restore relations with Seisakoku, right? That's what he said? Tell me, is that what he said?"

Her way of talking is so forceful, her attitude unyielding. But because she's full of confidence, it's easy for anyone of lesser will to surrender. At this moment I can't help the urge to hug her legs and say, "Ooooohh~ Boss, or should I say, Onee-sama^[11], I'll follow you everywhere." She's the type of person who, in an election, will definitely win the middle votes.

"Everyone gathered here knows, Seisakoku's relations with other countries stopped since two thousand years ago. Back then, Shimaron didn't even exist. In other words, to the former, the latter can be said as a minuscule new power from the outside world, like a scab formed just a few days ago, or a newborn mudskipper or chick. And now they say they want to 'restore' relations, even grammatically it's wrong. Do you think that with Shou Shimaron suggesting an alliance under these circumstances, will Seisakoku agree so easily? What do you think, Lord von Voltaire? You who have wasted almost a hundred and thirty years of your life, do you think you would possibly befriend a newborn baby? Would you treat him as an equal, give him a friendly hug and swear to live or die with him? Ah, if it's you, you might just do so out of sentiment. But under those circumstances, the only one who would hug him so easily, could only be you who

loves helpless little animals so much. Anyone who thinks normally would never sincerely make friends with a baby.”

The fingers Gwendal laced on the table twitches a little. I can almost hear him screaming inside: “If you know it, then don’t take me for an example in the first place!”

Anissina puts her hands on her hips, continuing in a tone that allows for no doubt. By now forty percent of the people in the room have been taking hostage by the red devil.

“Even if they are willing to make the deal, there’s no way they would listen to the human’s hopes and lend their military to Shimaron, is there? Listen up, everybody, this is that Seisakoku we’re talking about, y’know? Do you really think that the country that can’t even be bothered to deal with their neighbours would go through all the trouble of sending troops across the sea for a war? According to my judgment, the chances are as slim as strand of hair. And I mean a temple monk’s hair, that one hair that wasn’t shaved off! But all of you are jumping to conclusions based on such a small number, freaking out just because you’re scared of being threatened, or going to war—how stupid of you. Really, that’s why you men are so useless!”

Her last line forces several people to lower their heads and go silent, looks like they’re the ‘useless’ people she meant.

“...Lady Anissina r-really is something...”

As for me, I make the ultimate decree—‘if you want to live, don’t get on her wrong side’. Even though she and her high red ponytail don’t like anything like the bad guy.

“Do we really have to sway over a chance as thin as a hair missed by the razor, holding our heads and screaming that the country’s done for? Instead of everyone moping here and sighing, why don’t we first send someone from this table to the actual location and verify the information? On the off chance that Seisakoku actually does build relations with Shou Shimaron, and proceeds to make an unreasonable request with regards to military force, then why don’t we just interfere then? It’s just a hair-thin chance! All we have to is shave off that last hair, then we’ll be fine!”

“Please don’t mention shaving hair any more...”

For some reason Günter starts sobbing, probably because it brought up some bad memories for him.

“I see. Lady von Karbelnikoff’s words ring true, what about Your Majesty’s opinion?”

It took him a while to stop his finger movements, but Gwen throws the question at me abruptly, causing me to say in a strange voice,

“P-please deal with it appropriately.”

“Very good, how about everyone else?”

There aren’t any objections. Having taken over as speaker, Gwendal trains his seemingly annoyed gaze downwards, but then he immediately returns to his normal form, using that soul-shaking deep voice to announce to everyone present:

“The problem now is, who do we send? All of you know how tense the relationship between our country and Shou Shimaron is. Considering the current situation, we must not simply send our troops forth, lest we provoke the other party. Therefore, we can only send the minimum number of guards, so if there’s a general suited for defense in the envoy, we can rest much easier. And since this person will go as special ambassador on an official visit, we must also send someone of appropriate status. Otherwise, not only will the other side look down on us, we would practically be creating an opportunity for them to strike where we are weak. Hence, we must make this decision cautiously, and take action cautiously. If anyone wishes to volunteer, please quietly raise your hand, Teacher won’t be mad, and close your eyes like this.”

“Gwendal, you should know who the best choice...”

Before Günter even finishes his sentence, everybody present raises their hands. As expected from the crème de la crop of the Shin Makoku. I who also meant to raise my hand, am now left with an extremely painful wrist. I forgot that my hands were cuffed.

“So everyone is willing?”

Even Lord von Voltaire has his hand raised high, his frown deepening further. After he gazes around at all the attendees, his eyes stop on Lady Anissina.

"I hope Lady von Karbelnikoff can step back of her own accord. You will definitely cause damage to Shou Shimaron and bring unnecessary chaos. N-no, what I meant was, don't you still have something important to do, like controlling the quality of the fermenting poisons? And Wolfram, you too."

"Why, Brother?! I have the ability to protect my own safety, and I've even inherited the bloodline of the previous Maou. When it comes to status, shouldn't I be the perfect man for the job? And more than anyone else, I have the spirit and patriotism that make a general. Please allow me..."

"Then should you mess things up, are you mentally prepared to disembowel yourself a punishment?"

Wow, just thinking about it makes me pale, eeeek—it sounds even more painful than seppuku.

"If you obtain everyone's approval here and take upon yourself the duty of heading to Shou Shimaron, that is equal to a royal decree—in other words, you will be sent there as the representative of the Shin Makoku under His Majesty the Maou's name. If for some small reason you fail, the responsibility lies not only on you, but also on the Maou, maybe even the country. It's not something you can shake off by regretting or apologizing, do you have the resolve to take up this responsibility with your life?"

Wolfram bites his beautiful lips, but then he immediately clenches his fist. Although he looks like a weak bishounen, he's actually a passionate man. I just discovered that today.

"From the day I swore my oath to the king, I've been prepared mentally for that."

The oldest brother's expression looks even more painful. Unsurprisingly, because there's no way Gwen would send his beloved youngest brother somewhere dangerous. But I was defeated by Lord von Bielefeld's words. The decision this bad-tempered stubborn angel made puts his life on the line, and he even said he's mentally prepared for it.

He said, "From the day I swore my oath to the king."

Which king?

I instinctively swallow. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth, which has suddenly gone dry.

It's me!

Wolf is talking about us.

My tongue has gone stiff, but I can't keep quiet just because of that. This is something a king should face. And since I'm the king of Shin Makoku, this is something I must see with my own eyes. As my hand is cuffed to the chair, I yell desperately to get their attention.

"MeMeMeMeMe! I'll go! I'll go I'll go I'll go--!"

Crap, why does my voice suddenly sound as high as a woman's.

"I'll go to Shou Shimaron myself..."

"No!"

"No way!"

And I'm immediately rejected, with a stereo effect from both sides, no less.

"Why not! Isn't this a huge crisis that can impact the country's survival? If so, there's all the more reason for me to scout out the situation, enemy surveillance is also an important duty, tight?"

"You barely just escaped from Shou Shimaron with your life! Don't tell me you still don't understand the kind of danger Shimaron poses to us mazokus after going through so much?"

"C'mon, Wolf, don't make a fuss just because you can't go! Besides, this is representing the country on an official visit, right? Then the other side will definitely treat us carefully as honored guests. I've seen this type of thing in the news too, I know what kind of treatment an international-level guest gets!"

"International-level guest? You're saying those guys in Shou Shimaron will treat us as international-level guests?"

The bisohunen purposely raises his pitch, shrugging his shoulders in an

American way,

"To those people, we are the only country that's ever won them in a war. That's a fact that won't change even after twenty years, why would they treat the enemy they hate with all their heart as honored guests?"

"...But isn't that the give-and-take way of interacting between adults?"

Even if the relationship is bad... No, even if we are at war, we must welcome the ambassador with caution and respect. Isn't that what they mean by international unions? Even if my confidence is beginning to sway, I desperately try to convince myself.

"Naïve. You really are too naïve, Yuu..."

The man in charge of Shin Makoku's first ever virtual live broadcast satellite pigeon team, is nervously clearing his throat, interrupting Wolfram's words.

"Report! We just received the replies from Their Excellencies who could not make it. Now I will read them out for the audience: 'Eh? What kind of place is Seisakoku? Although compared to pigeons, I prefer chickens~~' ...This is Lord Densham von Karbelnikoff's reply."

Aren't you too slow? And there's no content to speak of.

"Next is from the Radford territory... What? Catalpa Number 2 was attacked by an eagle dog mid-flight and is currently missing in action?! How can this be... Unfortunately, the pigeon has died."

The traumatised pigeon trainer sags his shoulders, as though saying now that the pigeons aren't working, what about the Kotsuhizoku?

" 'Speaking of Seisakoku, it reminds me of the vast white lands of the south, apparently it's a place filled with power of the gods. Oh, yeah, husband dear, today's dish is ripe eggplant...' That's the content we got... Eek, ripe eggplant?! They dare to eat such a terrifying thing, what's up with that couple?"

Although I'm more concerned about the tragedy that might come with using eggplants for a dish, I think it's safe to say that this game of 'telephone' has failed. As man in charge, Gwendal's hands start fidgeting again. He's probably getting impatient with the fruitless meeting.

"If so, then I..."

"That won't work—if Gwen leaves the capital, who'll be in charge of the financial matters?"

He glares at me, hinting "that's your job, y'know", but practically speaking, the basic requirement for ruling is to use your talents where they work best. If everything is dumped onto an utterly useless king, then it won't be long before the country is thrown into havoc. It's precisely because his appearance, brains and leg length are all better than me, not to mention his wide expanse of knowledge and experience, that someone as careless as me can rest easy as king. Sorry I made the wrinkle in his brow even deeper, but other than asking him to work a little harder, there's really nothing else to do.

Although... now I will occasionally remember, that this way of doing things is basically Gwendal's own wish. Logically, on that nostalgic day of my coronation, he probably already knew that he would be running the country. The only thing he miscalculated is, I'm not the kind of king that will obediently follow orders.

The competent and therefore overworked oldest brother pushes the hair away from his forehead, saying,

"Either way, His Majesty, Lord von Bielefeld and Lady von Karbelnikoff cannot go. If someone can help me deal with the mountain of trivial matters here, I sincerely hope I can go myself. Lord von Wincott is in danger if ever he leaves the land, so I would recommend sending Lord von Rochefort..."

"I'll go."



These words spoken abruptly out of necessity instantly shut everyone else up.
After all, he's the one person no one thought about.

"If it is possible, I am willing to head to that country under Your Majesty's orders."

All eyes turn to him, and Lord von Christ Günter is looking straight at me.

References

1. ↑ A pun about someone whose name sounded a lot like 'Knights of the Round Table'
2. ↑ Could be the Yankee's hairstyle of the 80/90s, or the ones used by the *bosozoku*, those Yankee guys in motorcycles. It's the pompadour with the hair in the shape of a "corn", references here:
http://peonypress.com.au/wp-content/uploads/SPP_GeorgeHashiguchi_1981b1.jpg
<http://www.tristone.co.jp/blog/mamiya/img/photo/1319106539.jpg>

http://images6.fanpop.com/image/answers/3005000/3005378_134767645

3. ↑ I think this is a reference to a police show he uses quite often?
4. ↑ Probably referring to the medieval Japanese hair style for men, around the Edo period.
5. ↑ Any words originally in English will be in full caps.
6. ↑ 「キングオブヘナチョコ」 (KING OF HENACHOKO)
7. ↑ A manmade island from the 17th century when Japan was under lockdown, has trade affairs with Holland, was the country's only window to the outside world
8. ↑ A simple and sweet sponge cake
9. ↑ In 1828, Dr Siebert from a Dutch marine company was discovered with a prohibited Japanese map on his way out of the country, and so he was expelled from the country and forbidden from returning.
10. ↑ 'Scolding' and 'Siebert' sound the same in Japanese
11. ↑ Yakuza term for lady gang leader xD

Chapter 4

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There's the sound of waves in the distance.

Thank goodness for the rays of light shining in from the crack in the wall, it's the only way we know that it's not night yet. But the space really is cramp and dark, and there's the suffocating smell of fruits.

"That's why I didn't want to hide in the mandarin crate! The color orange gets on my nerves every time!"

"You're really noisy, Yuuri. If we followed what you said and hid in the crate with fish, by now we'd have choked on the odor of fish... Oh-umph!"

"Waa—Wolf! Don't puke don't puke! Don't puke here! I wanted to say that the fish crate was already cleared and washed, so we wouldn't have to squeeze with the fruits like this, and there's so smell. Tsk, and I thought that stowing away with the food cargo was a good idea too... Oh, no, Wolf, someone's coming!"

After a frantic mess of footsteps, someone runs into the food storage. Since they're in such a hurry, perhaps they're preparing dinner now. I check my hardworking G-SHOCK, and find out that it's now 5.20 pm. The tips of my feet step on some more mandarins, squashing out more sour juice.

"I mmph—would now rather be fund mmph—it's probably more relaxing than now mmmph. After all we left the land ages ago, they can't turn back now mm-ph!"

"Don't say silly things with such a weird suffix. We're stowaways, remember! If we get caught, we'll definitely get tossed into the sea by our necks!"

"Toss you and I into the sea? Who would dare? Even the so-called 'Tough Guy Sea Monster' Sizemore wouldn't dare be so rude to the king and his fiancé?"

"No, the problem is Günter. Still remember that moving speech he made? The way I see it, he just didn't say 'might not make it back alive' aloud. He obviously knows this mission is very dangerous, and in the mood he's in now, he would

never let us tag along.

“... About that, Shou Shimaron is very dangerous.”

“But Günter is conducting an official visit as special ambassador, there shouldn’t be any dangers, right?”

After an emotional transformation, Lord von Christ, who at some point became ‘real Günter’, personally volunteered to head to Seisakoku, and no matter what anyone else said he refused to listen. Since I have no idea what his political methods are, all I could do was to try and stop him with all I got, and finally his tear ducts started to loosen up.

“I say, Günter, even if the virtual live conference failed, there’s no need for you to volunteer yourself to make up for it!”

“That’s right. Günter, this mission should be mine anyway. Don’t tell me that after the Yuki Günter and Kiku Günter incident, the screws in your brain have gone loose?”

“Ah, then next time why don’t you try becoming Kuzuyu Günter? Yuki, Kiku, Kuzuyu... hey, it’s a word-connecting game!”

sob Your Majesty, I never thought that you would be so worried for me, you really are a good king who appreciates your officials. Coming into contact with Your Majesty’s beautiful and pure soul, I, von Christ Günter, feels like I might melt. However, please allow me to complete just this one mission. Even if our fate as king and minister will be broken, I am still willing to head for that dangerous land! Oh~ Your Majesty, just the thought of never seeing your beautiful black eyes again... No, I should say ‘not seeing your eyes for now’, my little heart beats painfully, like ‘payo-payo’, in my chest.”

Even the way the way he praises is unique.

What’s really surprising, is the ease with which Gwendal agreed, and every other noble present even gave him the ‘honor’ of being special ambassador. Even Lady Anissina, who never has a good word for men, agreed,

“Come to think of it, maybe you are very suited for it.”

Why? What could be in the heart of Shou Shimaron? Something that suits

super bishies?!

When I came to that idea, I was already excitedly planning my stowaway.

So we hid in the wooden crates filled with food, and then we were sent onto the departing “Friends on the Sea”. Captain Sizemore is a brave but gentle strongman, and also a good guy who’s secretly worried about his receding hairline. Although it’s not like I don’t know him, but since he has an important position in the navy, I don’t dare to openly ask him to help me stowaway. If I did, he would most likely be torn between Günter and I, and lose even more hair over it. That’s why I decided to fight alone, but why on earth did the easily seasick Wolfram have to come along too?”

I’m really worried because there’s no telling when he’ll puke. And our knees have been knocking each other since just now, in a really painful way too.

“This place really is cramped, huh? A space like this can’t help but remind you of ‘Poison Lady Anissina’.”

“Ouch! Don’t stretch your legs! Forget about my Windpipe no 1, your sword gets in the way too... What? Why would you mention ‘Poison Lady Anissina’ at a time like this?”

“Because in one book they described how a purse-fixing expert opened the lid to find Anissina stuffed inside. I brought it if you wanna read it, here!”

Wolfram pulls out a particularly small, around Collector’s Edition^[1] sized book. Shouldn’t the cover be intricate leather, though?

“This is the mass-produced version.”

“M-mass produced Anissina...”

“She gave it to me, saying it’s for spreading the teachings, and she wants me to secretly put them in the drawers of all the hotels we stay at.”

“It’s not as though this is the holy bible, and she didn’t say ‘spread the word’, but ‘spread the teachings’?!”^[2]

If Lady Cheri is the Love Huntress with the superb methods, then Lady Anissina is the global Poison Lady who transcends worlds? One is the beautiful leader of the Free Love Party, the other is the terrifying founder of the ‘Poison Lady

Anissina' cult. It's hard to tell which one is more impressive, and I have no intention of commenting either.

I cheat by using my pointer finger to touch the pages inside. What I'm doing will probably shock even the super-powered people of China, but that's because I read much faster with my fingers than with my eyes.

"Damn... As expected of the latest printing technology, there's barely any difference between the printed parts and the white parts when it comes to touch, I can feel only a teeny tiny difference. Guess I can't read in this dark place then. Hmm... What does it say?"

"When the repairman opens the cover of the purse, a blinding light shines into his eyes."

"Waa!"

And at that moment the world really did suddenly shine before our eyes, I was even surprised that even the mass-produced books would have magic on them. Right now, a light even more piercing than a spotlight shines in from above, where the cover has been lifted off completely.

Crap, we've been discovered by the kitchen crew!

"... That's weird?!"

He probably thought he was seeing things. The man closes the lid immediately, then opens it again, staring at Wolfram and I, who are in turn staring at the ceiling. Besides the position of the light that hides his face from my sight, I notice that the man's head is particularly shiny. His scalp is rubbed till it's shiny as a mirror, reflecting the light from the lamp.

"Eehh--?! Who did this, who mistook His Majesty and His Excellency for food?"

What a familiar voice.

"Shh--! Shh--! It's not what you think, Dakaskos!"

Turns out he's Lord von Christ Günter's miscellaneous man, Lilit Latchie Nanata Micotan Dakaskos. It took me forever to remember his full name, but whenever I say it he starts crying. That shaven head gleaming, Dakaskos repeatedly wipes his hands on his lacy apron.

"Milords, what are you doing in the fruit crates? Are you conducting some sort of experiment?"

"Before that, why are you wearing one of those shoujo dreamy aprons? When did you become Sizemore's chef?"

"No, no. Actually last time after I returned home to try and make my wife happy, I ended up making her more and more angry instead. As a result, I had to decide between 'silence is golden', or sleeping separately at home. Since even staying home was so miserable, I decided to change my profession and find a job that keeps me away from home for long periods of time, eventually stumbling across Captain Sizemore's recruitment drive. I'm still an apprentice supplies soldier, though, living the 'every day is peeling day' life. If milords keep staying in the crates, you'll probably rendezvous with the head of the kitchen shortly."

"Rendezvous? That won't do, we'll be very troubled."

Aside from the naggy and friendly but not very bright Dakaskos, we strictly forbid him from telling anyone else, and then we leave the food storage. Even using magical propelling energy, it takes at least seven days to get to Shou Shimaron. Add that to the changes in the weather, and it'll take more than ten days. Even though it's not even halfway yet, but since we've already been discovered, there's no more need to hide in the cramp little crate.

Dakaskos half looks like he's gonna cry when he says it's still better if we report to the captain, but just thinking about how badly Günter will scold us, we decide to keep as few people in the loop as possible.

"After all, we're talking about Lord von Christ Günter here, if his jealousy turns to hatred, he'll definitely shoot beams out of his eyes, and supersonic rays out of his mouth and curse us to death!"

"How could you say that? Your Majesty! Then what about me, who hid milords in my room? Is it okay if I get punished?"

"Sorry."

"... Eek!"

Perhaps because he's imagining some scary scene, all the baby hairs on Dakaskos' scalp stand on end. Farewell, Dakaskos. We'll never forget the great

sacrifice of your head... No. We'll never forget the light of your life.

Even though we've moved from the food storage to the cabin, we still spend each day in hiding. We've escaped from the darkness and suffocating space, but in a high-level kitchen apprentice's room with only one bed, it doesn't take much to guess that there won't be an attached bathroom. So we have to keep our guard up whenever we want to go to the bathroom, even going in disguise lest we be noticed. Having tied up my black hair with a scarf, I feel like a weird chef with no nationality. As for Wolfram, he wore a white chef's hat and immediately transformed into a cute little cook.

In the daytime when there are more people around, we can only mope around in the room, sometimes sleeping on the simple and small bed that looks like a stretcher, sometimes reading 'Poison Lady Anissina' carefully. I haven't read a book so seriously in a long time, perhaps even since I read the baseball rule manual. I even memorized the long-winded lines, imitating all the voices from old people to little girls. After we get back, I'll read it to Greta immediately. My reading skills have become surprisingly good, children's books really are useful for beginners to the language.

"L-let m-me continue reading--"

"Hang in there, Yuuri! If you go on like this, you'll get poisoned!"

"I'm just worried about the perpetual victim, Gwe Dal!" It's really very scary.

Once the sky goes dark, and the activity outside decreases, we're free to enter and leave the room, as long as we're careful. Just like how the dads would duck into the balcony to sneak a smoke, we'd stay on a corner of the deck for a breath. After letting the cold breeze blow past his cheeks, Wolfram finally recovers from his seasickness.

Since this isn't a luxurious cruise like last time, there aren't any balls after meals or social activities like a saloon. I don't blame them, this ship is headed for a country on bad terms with us, after all. But this is still one of Shin Makoku's famous large-scale battleships, so there are plenty of basic entertainment facilities for the soldiers. From a distance I can hear the lively sounds of a violin, and the timely cheers are proof.

Wolf and I loiter around a corner near the stern of the ship where no one

patrols, not saying much. The crew's merry singing and the steady rhythm of the waves fill my ears.

The only thing bobbing on the surface is the light from 'Friends on the Sea'—there's not a star in sight.

"Yuuri."

"Mm?"

"If you want to, go over there and have some fun."

"Where do you mean by 'there'? The crew's drinking party? Please, you know that I don't touch smokes or alcohol. And our disguise this time is so simple, what if we're discovered? Don't forget, we're currently in the complicated position of 'stowaways', you could call this Mission Impossible: Stowaway!"

"As long as you're happy."

Leaning on the painted-white railing, Wolfram says while looking into the sea.

"That... I mean, you like mixing with people lower in status than you, right? Even if you're in the capital, you'll just sneak out of the castle straight away, even in Covenant Castle you like to stick around the kitchens or the stables. Basically... Well, you're always with Conrad, so I just thought that the lively atmosphere would suit you."

"Oh-- I see."

Gripping the cold iron railing, I gaze into the waves too. Right now my heart is filled with an endless sense of unease, and I start to suspect: will I ever reach the shore?

"Although it's a little lonely, but I never thought of mixing with them, y'know. This ship is headed from Shou Shimaron with a heavy duty. Personally, I believe that this journey will definitely be a safe one, but everyone else doesn't think so, do they? Just like that time in the imperial meeting, I'm sure there are still a lot of people who think they're the enemy. Maybe some of them feel sure that they'll be attacked, and have mentally prepared themselves to enter enemy territory."

When my arm and waist hits the railing, my sour muscles cry out in pain in

spite of myself.

“But it never occurred to me that everyone is living so warily, it’s just impossible to imagine, that’s why I don’t want to disturb one of their rare days of peace. If their boss suddenly walks into their free-for-all party, there’s no way they can relax, huh? I don’t care at all whether they talk to me respectfully or not, but if I cause them to worry then I won’t be able to get over it myself.”

I subconsciously shake my head.

“...I don’t want to ruin their fun, and besides...”

Suddenly there are cheers, followed by enthusiastic applause—maybe someone’s having a drinking match. At that moment, even the corners of my lips lift naturally. Let’s just hope that no one collapses due to acute alcohol poisoning.

“Besides, I’m not alone here either.”

“Hmph, you finally have some awareness as a leader?”

I can hear the purposely suppressed joy in his voice.

“It depends on the time and location, Wolf. Time and location.”

I really don’t know which one of us should be feeling embarrassed now.

“If you want to drink, why don’t you get some wine from the kitchen? It’s okay, you don’t have to abstain from alcohol just because I do. You’re already eighty-two, after all, though it’s true that you should take care of your liver.”

“If I get drunk and end up interrogated by a certain someone, you’ll laugh at me for the rest of my life... Hey!”

Wolfram’s tone and expression changes abruptly as he points to the other side of the ocean, the direction this ship is headed for.

“What’s that?”

“Probably ship lights?”

There’s a flickering light on the surface of the black ocean. But those lights start increasing immediately, and approach us at a fairly fast speed. The sentry yells on the top of his lungs, and there’s a sudden commotion in the ship. The

night duty crew start running across the deck.

Since the speed and distance with which we approach each other is similar, they conclude that the torchlight is coming from another large-scale battle ship, but at least it's not an entire fleet or army.

"Hey hey hey, don't tell me it's pirates again--"

"How can it be? We're already in Shimaron territory, surely there aren't pirates who are that stupid, right? I'd sooner believe that's a giant squid..."

Upon hearing that, Wolfram starts shaking.

"Why, Wolf, are you scared of squids?"

"Y-you wouldn't understand how scary that can be! C-calm down, calm down, a squid-fishing boat can't be that big."

"Then could it be Shou Shimaron's warship?"

Our corner near the stern may be quiet, but anywhere that may be attacked is already covered with soldiers, each going to their respective positions. What I can do now, is pray that there won't be any tragedies.

"Waa, thank goodness milords are here! Your Majesty, Your Excellency, please retreat to the cabin at once! If you stay in such a dangerous place, once the enemy starts using catapults, who knows what will happen!"

Dakaskos rushes over, hairless head sweating buckets and an inflated life preserver in his arms. He was probably worried we'd drowned or something.

"That won't do, I have the duty to watch the battle from the sides. In the worst case scenario, should we lose the highest ranking officer, I'll have to take his place in charge."

"Eh? Even though we're stowaways?! Well, according to what you just said, then I'll have to watch too. Although I don't want to be pessimistic, but if the captain and Günter get hurt, then the responsibility will first fall to me, and not you, Wolf."

"... I get the feeling that if we leave it to you, you'll probably surrender straight away..."

"Aah—Please, spare me, young masters--"

The kitchen apprentice half cries, half pleads as he pulls the stubborn duo's sleeves.

"It's not a warship! It's a patrol ship!"

The sentry above reports.

Great, now we won't get ambushed. Speaking of patrol ships, does that mean, uh—An organization like the marine customs? If they ask for the ship's credentials, it'll definitely check out, so by right they shouldn't have to investigate further. Sizemore should be used to these situations, too. No, perhaps this is a problem that the captain doesn't even need to deal with it himself, one that can be solved easily by the guard on duty.

Just when we're about to return to the cabin, the clouds shading the moon are suddenly swept away by a gust of wind, and faint moonlight shines onto the surface of the sea. A black ship tinted oddly with white enters our field of vision.

"Wait."

"Why?"

"I think there's something there, between us and the Shimaron ship. Look, there, there's people on board!"

It's an old fishing boat with the mast about to break. It's filled with people, but not too many until they exceed the limit. The passengers are hugging each other tightly, trying to avoid falling overboard. I was just about to ask why there's a speck of light amidst the black waves, turns out those people are shockingly pale.

Under the moonlight, their hair and skin are so white, it looks like faded dye.

I saw two children just like them before. Those girls also had skin so white it was almost transparent, and blonde hair closer to the color of butter.

Those people can't do anything else but hug each other and shiver. Although I can't see them very clearly, it's obvious that they're terrified to the point where they don't dare make any noise anymore.

"Could it be a refugee boat? I've seen those in the films they played in history class, like during the Vietnam War or Cambodian refugees."

"What countries are you talking about?"

"What countries, you ask? They're Earth's—Ah! They attacked! They attacked a small unarmed boat!"

The Shimaron ship doesn't even bother with a warning, just aimed their catapult into the middle of the fishing boat. A large block like a rock punches a huge hole into the body of the boat, and it immediately starts slanting, throwing the people onboard into the sea.

"Unforgivable!"

"But they seem to want to rescue those people!"

It's just as Dakaskos says. The Shimaron ship is pulling all the people in the sea onboard, one by one. There are adults, kids, old folks, even mothers carrying babies. All of them are equally pale as they're pulled into the patrol ship. On our side, Captain Sizemore seems to have decided against interfering. Although it's unforgivable for them to attack an unarmed civilian vessel, if they insist that they were just trying to warn the boat and accidentally misfired, there's nothing we can say about it.

And as long as all the people are rescued, the rest has to be settled between those two parties. We're not exactly welcome here, either, so it's only natural that we wouldn't want to start a riot on another country's waters.

"...If that attack wasn't a warning, then Shou Shimaron really is a scary country."

"Now only you're saying that, haven't I been telling you from the start?"

Once most of the passengers are rescued, the patrol ship starts taking precautions against our ship, asking run-of-the-mill questions like, "Where is your ship coming from?", "What are your intentions?", "Where do you plan to land?", and "Have you gotten permission from the Shou Shimaron navy?" etc.

Since there isn't anything else suspicious except for the two stowaways, the investigation goes smoothly. Leaning my arm on the railing to watch the soldiers cause a ruckus, I suddenly shift my gaze to the surface of the sea. In the black waves after the moon has disappeared, I notice something shaking slightly in the corner of my eye.

“...That’s weird...”

Just underneath us, there’s a white object standing out against the pitch black.

I use my 2.0 vision to look closely.

It’s an arm? “Ah, Your Majesty?!”

Before I’ve completely confirmed whether or not it’s an arm, I’ve already tossed the lifebuoy in Dakaskos’ arms down. The rope curves beautifully, the inflatable landing on the water.

Two pale, thin arms finally grab a hold of the life preserver. But what’s surprising is that there’s someone else clinging tightly to the person whose head has already broken the surface.

Normally, this is when I should be yelling, “Hang in there! Just a little more!” to encourage the ones in the water, but seeing the way they barely even dare to pant, I suddenly feel that we shouldn’t make a scene either.

“Hold on, I’m coming down to save you! Tie the rope around your waists!”

“Bring the rope over here, and tie it there. Yuuri, switch positions with Dakaskos. Are they two children?”

“I-I think so.”

Wolfram mutters, “Then we’ll do it ourselves,” and grabs the rope behind me. The Shou Shimaron patrollers and our own crew don’t notice this little rescue mission at the back.

After struggling with the rope for a while, two slender bodies are finally pulled near the deck. The white hands that were clinging desperately onto the lifebuoy, now grab the round railings tightly. We wildly tug at the children’s hair and clothes, dragging them onboard.

“...F-finally, we—we saved them.”

“Looks we should send them to the healthcare room now, and we’d better return them to the Shou Shimaron as soon as possible too, it’d be better for them to stay with the others.”

“That’s true, there are so many of them there, if there are o-only two here, i-it

must be r-really scary."

You can't be serious, Shibuya Yuuri? Just that little bit of exertion already has you panting so badly?

The duo that we saved are reduced to all fours on the deck too, desperately trying to catch their breath. They point at me with their fingers several times, but then they immediately put their hands down, probably trying to say something but can't find the breath to form the words.

The language that comes with the irregular breathing, is one we've never heard before.

Their limbs are lithe and long, their skin as white as those adults. They have pale blonde hair, although it only reaches around their chins. Even the weak oil lamp can illuminate their skinny bodies, but only those rare golden eyes are shining brightly.

They look exactly the same, reminding me of the girls I met in Dai Shimaron.

Jason and Freddy, a pair of beautiful twins with amazing powers. I remember someone said they were shinzokus brought in from another country.

"So, these two are also... shinzokus?"

"That's right."

I stop Dakaskos, who wanted to keep the two of them standing, while Wolfram says with a solemn expression,

"I'm afraid they're probably from Seisakoku."

"What?! By Seisakoku you mean the country in lockdown? Are all the people there Jason and Freddy?! No, I mean, are they all shinzoku who look like Jason and Freddy?"

Perhaps because they understand that we're saying the name of their country, because one of the strong kids holding onto the lifebuoy suddenly raises his head. I know it's very rude to stare, but he should be a boy. The other's a girl. Both of them look around twelve, thirteen years old. Although I can't tell which one of them is older, the two of them do look very similar.

"...Save..."

We still can't communicate.

"Your Majesty, take mine too."

Seeing that I've taken off my jacket to put over one of the children, Dakaskos hurriedly hands over his. The adult coat wraps both of them up completely, when suddenly the girl starts sniffling, eventually bawling with a rough voice. The boy—we don't know if he's her older brother or younger brother—scolds her shortly, but her tears continue flowing unbidden, like a broken dam.

"Ah—Sorry, your bodies are still soaked. Go inside, it's warmer in there. And don't be so sad... Not working? Oh, yeah, take this."

I pull down the scarf around my hair, and hand it to her so she can wipe her tears.

Unexpectedly, both their bodies suddenly stiffen.

"Crap, sorry. You're scared of being touched, aren't you?"

But the siblings' eyes are trained on my black hair. Shoot, black hair and eyes are an ominous sign to everyone except the mazoku. Seeing something so unlucky after experiencing such a trauma, anyone would be unsettled. If a black cat runs across my path when I'm cycling, I know I'd feel really depressed.

"I won't do anything. Don't worry, I won't do anything at all. Black hair IS nothing to be scared of--"

"...zoku?"

The boy opens and closes his mouth, pointing at me (whose voice had suddenly gone all weird). The unfamiliar sound he squeezes out of his throat is a word that we finally understand.

"...Mazoku?"

"Mazoku? That's right!"

He quickly grabs my hand and pulls it to his chest. I sense that behind me, Wolfram and Dakaskos already have their respective weapons in their hands. The pure white boy puts a trembling finger on my palm, slowly making a movement that he himself wants to confirm.

His pointer draws out a fixed line.

“Save”

“Save? Do you want me to save you? But you see, your friends are already fine. Just now all of you wanted aid from the Shou Shimaron ship, right? You’ll be reunited with your family real soon, if you don’t even want to change out of your wet clothes and return home as soon as possible, I’ll go contact them now--”

He shakes his head, as white and as beautiful as a bubblehead doll, then writes on my palm again.

“Mazoku”

“Save”

And then a high-pitched alarm rings somewhere in my brain.

References

1. ↑ A type of book in Japan made smaller to encourage customers to collect the whole series. around A6 in size. Something like a “pocket version”, available with most light novels.
2. ↑ I took some liberties with the terms used here, but basically it’s something religious versus something commercial.

Chapter 5

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A language barrier brings some considerable pressure.

Since I've never gone overseas on my own before, this is my first time experiencing that.

"The closest I got to this, would be the first Star Tour..."

Back then, Adalbert had suddenly appeared and turned on my inner translator. Although his methods weren't very good, you can't deny that it was convenient.

"Oh, yeah, why don't we use Adalbert's move by grabbing my head? I remember that's houjutsu, right? Since these children are shinzokus, their houryoku should be really good. If so, we'll just let them grab our heads, then we can communicate!"

"The condition is your soul must retain memories of that language, but these kids' souls may never have left Seisakoku."

"Right. Ah—Darn, this is hopeless!"

Even though the dialect does change here and there, but the language I use in Shin Makoku also works on human lands, so I always thought there was only one common language in this world, so we don't even need translators. But then again, it seems that mazoku and human cultures are interconnected, and that doesn't apply to shinzokus.

The two children we pulled from the sea are cuddling together on Dakaskos' simple bed. Since we have to be stealthy about it, we could only bring them here. The already cramped room now has five people squeezing in it, which it obviously wasn't designed for. Maybe they were even more comfortable on that little boat. But as we'd brought in three chairs from the dining room, there's at least place for us to sit.

"To be honest, you guys should have a hot bath first."

But it's only evening now, so there should still be people using the big bath

inside. All we can do now is give the pale duo clean clothes and some food, then wrapping them up in insulation, to try and warm them up a bit. If it weren't for their different hair lengths, the way they look now, both hands cradling a steamy hot cup, would make anyone suspect they're actually the same person.

"I'll ask again, then. What do you guys really want to say?"

The boy grabs my palm, writing 'mazoku' and 'save' again. It seems he's only learned these two words somewhere. I hold my head and say,

"Problem is, I have no idea what you mean. I can't understand at all! Do you want to save the mazoku? Or do you want us to save someone specific? You gotta clear up this point, at least!"

"Looks like we'd better discuss this with the captain."

Dakaskos keeps bringing towels, clothes, and leftover soup back and forth, and now he's saying that as he makes his second cup of tea, eyebrows drooping. From the very start he really wanted to report to Captain Sizemore.

"But if we do that, then we'll have to send these two back to the Shimaron ship, y'know. They purposely avoided being rescued by that patrol ship, and were even willing to be separated from the rest of the group to swim to us. Personally, I think there must a reason behind it."

"Then we should at least report this to His Excellency Günter."

"That's even worse!"

Wolfram refutes this suggestion immediately too. If he finds out that we stowed away, he'll definitely send us back to Shin Makoku straight away.

"...What a bother, why can Jason and Freddy speak the common language then?"

"Because they grew up in Dai Shimaron!"

Oh, yeah. Even if they're all shinzokus, their culture and education will change according to their surroundings. Speaking of which, I wonder if those twins have safely arrived back home? I asked the Dugard brothers to escort them back on the high-speed vessel. If their hometown is Seisakoku, then the brothers can only go as far as the manmade island.

"If only we can ask them about real situation behind the lockdown... Hmm?"

The shinzoku boy says something that sounds to us like 'roll shit roll shit'[\[1\]](#), shaking my shoulders. Then he grabs my arm with even more force than before.

"...Ja—Ja..."

"Eh, no, no, I'm not Jason, Jason and Freddy are shinzokus, like you. They're not here, technically they should already be back in your home country."

"Suusamarakashi!"

...I can't understand what they're saying at all, but I use similar sounds to say that it is 'Suusamarakashi'[\[2\]](#). The siblings look (temporarily) relieved, excitedly discussing something. Then the boy grabs my hand and puts it to his cold chest, saying simply,

"Zeta."

And he immediately moves my hand to the girl next to him, sticking it to her chest forcefully.

"Zuusha."

Standing behind me, Dakaskos mumbles,

"Could that be their names?"

Names? I look at the two children before me, and find that they're smiling sheepishly.

"Names? That's right, Dakaskos! Of course, those must be their names! So you're Zeta, and that girl is Zuusha? So the older sister is Zuusha, and the younger brother is Zeta? That's great, Zeta, even though you've only told us your names, I'm really happy! I'm Yuuri, this pretty boy here is Wolfram, and the shiny baldy is Dakaskos. REPEAT AFTER ME."

"PETER?"

"No, I'm not Peter."

Because I spoke too quickly, they didn't get to repeat it again, but they smile happily anyway, nodding in reply.

"Huh, since we can already introduce ourselves, it seems that sign language can still work as communications. I guess they know that Jason is a name."

This time Zeta starts echoing me. He's holding his (possibly) older sister, Zuusha's hand, both of them looking proud and pleased. Since their voices are filled with such liveliness, I can't help but repeat after them.

"Jason."

"Jason!"

"Ja—son."

"Edison."

It's just like a party on Friday the 13th, except that last name has nothing to do with any of it.

But the foreign children who went through so much trouble just to tell me their names suddenly turn serious, the siblings start whispering to each other. Perhaps after coming to some conclusion, the two of them nod their heads firmly. Zuusha reaches into the clothes they discarded aside, pulling out a piece of pale white paper folded into a tiny square, and hands it to me.

"Is this for me?"

"...Jason... Freddy..."

"Hmm? What? What are you saying? That Jason and Freddy wrote this?"

I desperately try to calm my shaking fingers, struggling with the wet paper folded four times. It took a while for me to get it open without tearing it, but the words are already blurred by the seawater. This piece of paper might have been torn from a larger sheet, because it's not a complete rectangle.

"Looks like another unreadable letter."

Although it's an extremely simple piece, the handwriting is big and slanted, so ugly it's like they were written with the left hand... No, I mean, the handwriting is very unique. The whole paper is dyed by the reddish-brown ink, becoming nothing more than a dyed piece of paper, though there seems to be something that looks like a signature at the bottom.

“Ahh—vaguely... I can see Ja-son, and the other is Freddy. It’s true, this was written by those girls! Why would you have a letter they wrote? Do you know them? Did you make friends with them in Seisakoku? Are the twins all right? What about the other children we sent back?”

“Give me that!”

Seeing as I didn’t even look at the letter before bombarding the children with questions, a hassled Wolfram snatches away the paper. He’s careful not to damage it, though, and then he carefully spreads it over a chair as a replacement for a table.



"Seems like those twins really did grow up in Shimaron, because this is written in the common language. Judging from these words, though, they probably never received a proper education."

"Most of the words are illegible, why didn't they use an oil-based ink to waterproof it?"

As soon as those pompous words left my mouth, Wolfram glares at me

fiercely. That's right, the spoiled and stubborn former prince.

"...Sorry, oil-based inks weren't invented here yet, right? Even so, you don't have to look at me like that."

"It's blood."

He touches the part that he painstakingly deciphered, sniffs it a little and repeats,

"It's written with blood."

"Blood? Whose blood? What does this mean? Uh—Are you talking about a curse or something?"

Dakaskos moans painfully, then, beginning with, "Please, no offense, milords", he says,

"I'm afraid they went to such drastic measures because they couldn't find any stationary, I'm guessing there were no pens, ink or paper ready then. This paper looks like it was torn from a paper bag, and they probably wrote it using a fingernail stained with blood on a paper that doesn't absorb water, that's why the words vanish once they touch seawater—because I received a letter like this once."

He rubs his head, his expression complicated.

"This type of letter is usually found on those returning from the battlefield, only most of the time... they can only be found on those killed in action."

"Da--"

I can't even say his name in one breath. The two children stand shoulder to shoulder, looking our way.

"You mean, these are usually found on corpses... So, Jason and Freddy..."

I swallow the painful words—"are already dead"—back down.

"Don't jump to conclusions, Yuuri. For now we can only be certain that they aren't in the most optimistic of situations. As for soldiers, they have that kind of will because they already prepared themselves mentally before going to war. Those twins aren't in the middle of a raging battlefield, and besides, if they really

are dead, how can they write a letter?"

Wolfram thumbs the recognizable part, helping me deduct the name and simple contents.

"And here, this should be the word 'save'. They're not using the verb properly, though. And see here, Yuuri, this is your name... Aah!"

Next to my name, there's a vaguely visible word.

"Apologize."

"...What's there to apologize for?"

I spread my right palm out wide, wanting to cover up this tragic letter. Because I don't want to read it anymore, and I don't want anyone else to know what it says, either.

"Why would those children want to apologize to me? There's nothing to apologize for, right? Why the hell would they go to all those lengths to write a letter like this? All they wanted was to go home, and all I did was send them home, why the hell would they need to apologize to me?"

I'm remembering the time we first met. They were surrounded by a thin veil of pure white, perhaps a trick of the weak winter sunlight, so that I could not pull my eyes away. However you look at it, they're perfectly symmetrical, and if you look closely, their irises are deep gold, scattered with faint green. That beauty is already beyond human, and, different from the forceful nature of the mazoku, there's a sickly yet fantastical sense in their beauty.

The unique way they talk, without any suffixes, honestly left me frustrated in the beginning.

But they...

The chair that I sweep away in my anger crashes into the wall with a violent noise.

"Damn!"

Still angry, I ram my fists into the wall, scaring the two on the bed to the point of shaking once. Their faces are so close to each other they're almost sticking together, and they're holding each other's hands tightly, heads lowered without

a word. That's when I realize that they're afraid.

"No, I'm not blaming you two."

But I still can't suppress this feeling. What I'm doing must be terrifying these poor children, who just had to fight for their lives, even more. If we could understand each other, at least I could still explain the reason. But under these circumstances, acting so emotional in front of them, really is a very bad move.

Since I can't explain, I walk out of the room and lean on the railing in the night, noting that Wolfram had issued simple orders to stop Dakaskos, who wanted to chase after me.

"Damn! You gotta be kidding me! What kind of a world is this?!"

I punch the walls, kick the deck, even throw around the life preservers on the hooks.

I even toss the rope we used earlier into the sea, stepping into the puddle we left behind.

Sensing my extreme emotions, the maseki on my chest starts heating up.

Although the weather is not hot in the slightest, cold sweat beats up at the area next to my right eye. When I'm miserable to the point of using my shoulders to catch my breath, an energetic voice comes from behind me.

"Gotten it all off your chest yet?"

"As if!"

I grip the cold white railing, staring into the black waves as I speak, not looking at Wolfram no matter what. Then I purposely release a deep breath—seems like my heart rate has gone back to normal.

"...Sorry, I get too angry too easily. My personality really is straight and forward, heh."

"I know."

His calmness surprises me. Did he always sound like this? No, I should say the way he's talking now sounds more like his oldest brother.

"I noticed... that I'm always losing control in front of you."

"Really? But you're feeling upset for the injustice those children have met. That's worth respecting."

"Don't compliment me. It's only right."

Before I regain my normal ability to think, I hope the sea and the night sky can comfort me. At least let me relax my fingers, holding on to the railing with an unnatural strength. The Shimaron ship is still nearby. And there are still small rowboats going back and forth from there to 'Friends on the Sea', on the ocean right under the large ships' decks.

"I remember saying so before."

He should be leaning on the wall, arms crossed. Lord von Bielefeld uses a stance similar to that of the gentler of his two brothers, saying with a level tone,

"Whatever it is, as long as it involves the shinzoku, it won't be good."

"I heard you, and I know that, I experienced it myself in Dai Shimaron. Even though I didn't go into shock, the situation back then really was something else."

That feeling was completely different from your average sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, leaving only weariness and weakness. It's true, whenever I get involved with the shinzoku, the Maou's soul inside me becomes sorta off. But still...

"But still you won't just sit by and watch, right? Fine, fine, I don't need to ask to know."

Blonde hair glittering in the lamplight, the former mazoku prince shakes his head in surprise, or should I say, faking a surprised look.

"You want to go to Seisakoku and save those twins, right? I really can't stand you, you just want to help every Tom, Dick and Harry you meet! The way this is going, I'm guessing you're probably gonna say something like 'all for one, and one for all'[\[3\]](#)!"

What should I do if it really gets to that? Wait, in that case I won't have anything to eat.

Just thinking about me going vegetarian, I almost force myself to change my mind. But that letter of blood is already engraved into my mind, and it's really

not that easy to convince me to change it.

"But, Wolf... I promise you, I won't leave your side halfway through, this much I can guarantee."

"Right."

"So let me go."

"What's the point of you telling me?"

Wolf lifts his chin as he speaks, looking like a patriarch lecturing the disappointing son.

"But don't forget, Yuuri, you're the Maou, the king of the Shin Makoku. You want to fix all the injustices in the world, fine, but you can't forget your country and people."

"I never forgot."

Never once have I thought myself capable of solving all the problems in the world. Because even if I have strange and wonderful powers I never would have even dreamed back on Earth, even if I was lifted onto the throne, I still don't think I can save anything. After all, I have absolutely no confidence in myself, to this day thinking of myself as nothing more than your average baseball kid.

"But Shin Makoku has Gwen... Lord von Voltaire, right? And then there's you, Günter, and Lady Anissina. Even if I'm not doing enough, you guys will help me solve the problems, right?"

"About that, who asked you to be one of history's rare nooby kings? That's why even Brother has to constantly put his all into helping you."

"Mm, but sometimes..."

Sometimes I'll feel uneasy too.

Wondering, what role do I play? Where do I belong?

"Yuuri?"

"Aah, sorry, it's nothing, nothing. God! How did it get this messy?! Just looking at it makes me embarrassed."

Once I've calmed down and looked around, I realize that the mess I made really

is unbearable. The life preservers on the deck are all over the place, buckets have been kicked over, if you walk without paying attention you stand a real chance of tripping over them. So I obediently pick them up one by one and return them to their original places. The third son, who's friendly despite his appearance, helps, and just when we are getting ready to roll the rope back—

“Please hold on! Eek—Help, young masters! Aah, please don’t be so rough--”

Dakaskos’ tragic voice is obviously a cry for help.

I jump over the buckets we haven’t cleaned up yet and into the corridors, where I see him with his back pressed firmly against the door. He’s blocking five men, protecting the cabin with his life.

And standing at one side, having brought a subordinate with him, Captain Sizemore looks shocked at his stubborn protests. I was just going to say why, even though his face is obviously very familiar, there’s just something off. Turns out he’s grown out a light brown beard, probably because he’s too concerned about the Saint Javier LEVELP^[4] hairdo.

Although I can only see the back of one of the men, but he should be a soldier from Shou Shimaron. Just seeing that cropped ponytail from afar makes his identity fairly obvious. If I walk to the front, I’ll surely see a neatly-trimmed beard, connected to his sideburns by a thin line.

Because the cropped ponytail is the standard hairstyle for Shou Shimaron soldiers.

“We’ve searched all the cabins nearby, this is the only one left. We suspect that you have hidden refugees from Seisakoku inside.”

“I-I-I t-t-t-told you there aren’t a-a-a-any refugees--”

“But there were people who saw someone on your ship pull two shinzoku children onboard with rope!”

“What on earth are you doing, Dakaskos? If you say there aren’t any, then just let them search the room and be done with it! Otherwise these patrolmen can’t report back to their ship!”

“I—can’t--! No matter what you say, I can’t. There aren’t any children in the

cabin! Anyway—if my wife finds out about this, she'll skin me alive--!"

At least Captain Sizemore has accepted what he said. I put the words 'good going, using your wife as a shield!' aside for later, and decide to intervene as the person responsible. I won't hand those children over to you. Zeta and Zuusha specifically looked to the mazoku, to me, for help. After living sixteen years, a simple lie should be easy as pie.

"Wait a moment, you people, stop acting like the boss on someone else's ship! We didn't rescue any kids!"

At that moment the captain's eyes are staring at me, mouth falling open in surprise, and the fingers plucking at his beard tangled into a mess.

"Y-Your Majesty?" But of course he didn't make any noise. Wolfram puts his chef's hat over my head, thanks, Mr Stubborn. Because it'd be bad if humans from another country saw my black hair. As for my eyes, I can scrape through as long as I keep my gaze on the ground, but hiding my hair completely is another matter altogether.

"I was listening to you from a side, you really like spouting nonsense, don't you? We're not hiding any refugee children, not—hiding—any—children--! Even if we really did save any refugee children, we don't have to have to hand them to you, do we?"

Faced with a rude and anxiously protesting me, the three Shou Shimaron patrolmen scoff in contempt.

"Captain, this dishwasher seems to be making a fuss about something."

"What did you say? Dishwasher? Stop joking around!"

"That's right, what are you saying? So rude, I didn't wash those dishes myself!"

After hearing what they said, though, I just realize that I'm wearing a kitchen apprentice's clothes, and since I look like a child just only in my teens, I must be the rookie of rookies, at the most in charge of peeling potatoes. But to Captain Sizemore, it's a different story. He knows the pissed off my and the angry Wolfram's true identities, but since he has no idea how to react to this situation his eyes have gone almost all white like a dead fish, even those they aren't really white.

But even so, the Shou Shimaron patrolmen are still relentlessly pushing Dakaskos, who's dead set determined yet still doesn't know what to do. This man is by nature gentle and passive, his shiny scalp gleaming even shinier under the coat of cold sweat, but it seems to me he's close to the breaking point, shivering uncontrollably.

The captain must have noticed something's up when I showed myself, so he rejects Shou Shimaron's request solemnly. But the patrolman seems to be of surprisingly high rank, so he isn't shaken off so easily. I didn't think that someone of such a high positions would come here personally, and in their conversations they even call him Admiral.

More and more people gather around to see what's the commotion. Some yell that they forced their way onto our ship, others even swear at them on purpose. The tipsy soldiers reach for their weapons, making the atmosphere so tense a spark could cause a full-blown confrontation. Things can't go on like this, I don't care if you're an admiral or an admirer, you should be nicer when talking to a king. I mean, please be nicer to me, I'm asking you nicely.

"Hey hey hey, don't you know I'm--"

"What's the ruckus so late in the night?!"

A loud and clear voice resounds from behind the crowd, and I lose my chance to bare my fake fangs.

The wall of seamen start splitting to the sides. A tall man with floating pale grey long hair and a long robe walks over elegantly.

The beautiful Prime Minister, the super bishie Education Minister, the pretty man whose killer move is the Nosebleed Bomb--- Lord von Christ Günter.

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Lord von Christ uses an annoyed yet still beautiful low voice to ask,

"What happened here, captain?"

"Your Excellency Günter!"

There's Sizemore, who looks obviously relieved, and Dakaskos, whose overwhelming sense of relief has caused his tears and snot to flow freely. And

then there's Wolfram and I, holding my head and squatting on the ground, screaming 'Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah, it's all over, he's here'.

The education minister was probably busy with his documents, because there's a pair of small thin-framed glasses sitting on his nose. If he doesn't open his mouth to speak, his knowledgeable and feminine beauty, suits silver lens perfectly. Problem is, once he notices Wolfram and I, who theoretically shouldn't be here, his long and beautiful brow jumps upwards abruptly. We're surprised, though, that his reaction isn't anywhere near as big as we'd anticipated.

He purposely bends down, whispering in my ear,

"What is milord doing here?"

"Umm—Uhh, about that.... Those old people glasses... No, those spectacles look really good on you, you're three times even prettier than normal."

"Your... Normally if I got your praise, my heart would rise into the heavens. But today sucking up to me at the last minute won't cut it, you know, and Wolfram too."

"I'm real sorry, Günter. I'm repenting, and I'll explain to you properly later. But now isn't the time to talk about that, we're facing a rare crisis here."

I send my strong 'help me, please' waves to Günter through my gaze, trying to make my eyes look moist. It's a trick I used on my family back in middle school when I wanted them to get me new baseball shoes. Since I've grown so much since then, I don't dare to expect much in the way of results.

"Mmph!"

Günter puts his hand by his mouth, half squatting as he leaves my side.

"T-the reason you two are here, I-I-I'll get it out of you later!"

Seems like it works. After all, to a centenarian like Günter, sixteen-year-old me am like a grandson. No matter how tall they grow, a grandson is still a grandson, and even if the kid's a little spoiled and stubborn, he won't mind. If I'd known this earlier, I could've just used the teary-eyed technique to convince him to take me along.

Lord von Christ clears his throat deliberately, returning to his efficient official

expression, and uses a commanding tone to scatter the gathered crowd. Although many people look unsatisfied, but since it's the beautiful prime minister's orders they have no choice but to obey. And so, one by one they go back to their respective stations, cabins, and drinking spots.

"All right, whatever it is, please say it, Admiral."

The Shimaron patrolman's mood has obviously been soured, but even he should have noticed the newcomer's high status. In short terms he explains his suspicion that we're hiding refugees, and most likely in that cabin, as well as incidents such as how Dakaskos refused to budge from the door.

"I see... but I, Lord von Christ Günter, Special Ambassador of the Shin Makoku with Full Authority under Orders of the Maou, would never allow a riot on my ship. And you are suspecting 'Friends on the Sea', the vessel that I, Lord von Christ Günter, Special Ambassador of the Shin Makoku with Full Authority under Orders of the Maou, am aboard. Not only is this an act of humiliation against me, Lord von Christ Günter, Special Ambassador of the Shin Makoku with Full Authority under Orders of the Maou, but also against the entire Shin Makoku navy. Are you clear, you admiral or patrolman something? Our ship declares here and now, that we never rescued any refugees. Or do you not believe what I, Lord von Christ Günter, Special Ambassador of the Shin Makoku with Full Authority under Orders of the Maou, say?"

Probably scared by the overly long "Special Ambassador of the what-and-what", Ponytail shakes his head with a complicated expression.

"B-but, you have to give face to us Shimaron patrolmen too!"

"Honestly, you have a point, so..."

The patrolmen take a step back and brace themselves for the "Special Ambassador of the dot dot dot summarize the rest".

"How about we do it this way, you may send your Shou Shimaron soldiers to search the entire ship. Be it the dining hall or the regular toilets, or even the for-display-only golden toilet, you are welcome to enter. Of course, the captain's wig room included!"

Sizemore presses his head frantically.

"You can go ahead and search everywhere, you can even get down on all fours to search. But, with the sole exception of my, Lord von Christ Günter, Special Ambassador of the Shin Makoku with Full Authority under Orders of the Maou's room."

"What?"

The Shimaron men look timid. Günter lifts his beautifully carved chin, his presence overwhelming everyone else.

"That much should be obvious, no? After all, I am the Special Ambassador of the Shin Makoku..."

"Y-yes. We believe your reputation, we won't search your room, or any other rooms of high ranking officials."

Perhaps because he doesn't want to hear that motto again, the patrolman hurriedly interrupts Günter. I just never thought Günter was so happy to be chosen as ambassador.

"T-then, would this kitchen apprentice quickly make way? We've checked all the hiding areas near the deck, this is the only room left."

"That won't do."

The mazoku's excellent Prime Minister doesn't even glance Dakasko's 'Noo you can't' expression, replying without hesitation.

"Because this is my room."

What--?

The ponytailed patrolmen aren't the only ones surprised. With Wolf and me at the helm, even those few remaining onlookers are shocked to the point their feet stop in mid-air on the way to the door. As for Dakaskos, his jaw fell open too wide and became dislocated. Poor Captain Sizemore's eyeballs have gone out of focus, one pointing left while the other dangles right, making hid overall appearance rather scary.

"W-wait, aren't you Lord von Christ Günter, Special Ambassador of the Shin Makoku with Full Authority under Orders of the Maou? An official with a status as high as yours, there's no way you could have been allocated a room in the low

level quarters with normal soldiers, or mostly new recruits and apprentice crewmen, right? Even in our Shou Shimaron army, that is unimaginable."

"To be honest, I was originally allocated a guest's suite next to the captain's quarters. But don't judge me by how I look, I am also a man. I have a man's rights, and an adult relationship that I'd rather the captain and crew not know about!"

"Adult..."

"That's right, and a very passionate one, at that."

What--? Does that sentence mean you have a lover?

You say you don't want others finding out, but you said it yourself, Günter. Captain Sizemore claps his hands over his ears in a delayed motion, but it's too late.

"S-so you're saying this room is for that kind of thing... Wait, w-wait a second!"

The Shou Shimaron soldiers' expressions of panic are hilarious, and the middle-aged man who seems to have the highest position scratches the beard on his chin as he says,

"B-but even if this is a room for adult relationships, the location isn't too logical, is it? There's a humid sea breeze blowing, the floorboards are covered with seagull droppings, and the walls are so thin than any bedroom conversation can be heard clearly. It's hard to imagine that you would hide a mistress in a place as bad as this!"

At the word 'mistress', the patrolman with the textbook beard's neck turns red with embarrassment. Looks like he's an innocent old uncle, completely unlike what his appearance suggests.

However, Lord von Christ Günter replies firmly,

"I just happen to have that sort of preferences!"

Amazing! Günter, it's so rare for you to be so macho. Let me just remind you, the room number is 108^[5].

"T-that sort of preferences, huh... No, no no no, wait! I still don't get it. Even if Your Excellency has that sort of preferences, just if! Ladies still hope for a

romantic love, the woman in a profane relationship with... Mmph, sorry , I mean, the lady sowing seeds of love with Your Excellency would never..."

He tosses around his brown ponytail, pointing to the men around.

"This is the kind of place seamen and buff musclemen wander around, covered in sweat, dust and muscles, there shouldn't be any romantic atmosphere... Ah. D-d-d-d-d-don't tell me? Your Excellency's partner is?"

Lord von Christ Günter replies agitatedly,

"I said it before! I just happen to have that sort of preference... Eh?"

Interestingly, the Shimaron man's face turns from red to blue, then finally to a bleached white. But the only one wavering now seems to be the middle-aged patrolman with the highest position. The other younger subordinates are desperately trying to hold in their laughter.

"I-if s-so, this door can't be opened--"

The Shou Shimaron patrolmen start imagining what kind of character would be in that room, then they turn around and slip back to their own ship in a hurry.

Bet you their hearts are filled with headlines like 'The Shocking Truth! Mazoku Official's Fancy Sexual Preference', only they can't discuss the gossip on the spot. Once they get back to their ship, though, they'll definitely chatter excitedly about it nonstop, telling it to everyone who would listen. Maybe for this reason alone, the group of ponytails leaves the ship even faster than they boarded, without once turning back.

"Eh, wait? Please wait a second, have you misunderstood something?"

I show my gratitude to the impressive Prime Minister, and pat his shoulder lightly.

"Don't be so upset, Günter. Liking musclemen isn't a thing to be ashamed of."

"Eeeeeh?"

"That's right, Günter. Like Mother, she super loves them."

"Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeh--?"

I suddenly feel like I'm seeing Lady Cheri under a faraway sky, yelling,

"I—super—love—muslemen--" ... It's probably better if Gisela never found out about this.

References

1. ↑ Original Chinese text reads 'gun-fen', is that an SFX? ==
2. ↑ I think they're trying to say Seisakoku
3. ↑ Lit. everything in the world is my brother :3
4. ↑ A saint who, with the introduction of a Japanese friend, brought two Christians past the Malacca straits and to Kogashima in Kyuushuu, south of Japan. The first preacher to reach Japanese soil.
5. ↑ probably a reference to the many ghost stories set in 'Room 108'

Chapter 6

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After finding out the reason behind the patrolmen's quick departure, Lord von Christ starts wailing out loud. He bites a corner of his silk handkerchief, tears pouring from his violet eyes.

"I never imagined that even Your Majesty would misunderstand me, this is like the end of the world to me"--

"Aww, don't be so upset, Günter, I didn't misunderstand you. Alright, wipe your nose. So what's wrong with people finding out you like musclemen? Like me, I respect musclemen, I train every day hoping I can gain more muscle. Ahh, okay, okay, wipe your tears."

"Your Majesty? Bodybuilding?"

He pauses, possibly imagining my face on Adalbert's body.

"P-please, reconsider. Your Majesty is perfect enough as you are---"

To a growing teenage boy, that's a very rude thing to say. Besides, I plan on growing taller, and gaining 30 per cent in weight. Chest hair is in the to-do list too. In other words, I want to look manlier.

Anyway, all these random topics conveniently makes Günter forget to ask me about the reason we stowed away. I never knew luck like this existed in the world.

Zeta and Zuusha are moved to the Special Ambassador's room, Dakaskos and Sizemore tasked with looking after them. Because we're almost at Shou Shimaron, and once we land, Günter, Wolfram and I will have to leave 'Friends on the Sea'. Although I really want to go save Jason and Freddy, we still have to complete our main objective here first. After all, we're here to determine the truth behind the rumors about Shou Shimaron's urgent diplomatic plans, and if it turns out to be true, we have to stop it. That's the real reason we crossed the sea from the Shin Makoku in the first place.

We also got new information from the blood letter. Although even the most knowledgeable of us all, Lord von Christ can't interpret the Seisakoku language either, but the letter was written in the common language at a kindergartener's level. Once we read it calmly, with a clear head, there should be plenty more hidden clues.

"Right here. Vene... It's not easy, but I think it's Venera. Since our language has no such verb, it should be a noun? If not a place then a person. So, the word 'save' does not refer to the senders of the letter, but this 'Venera' place or person. As for the twins who are causing Your Majesty's low mood, perhaps they have something they are more worried for than their own lives."

Although it's only a temporary reassurance, Günter's words do put my heart slightly at ease. At least this proves that they're still in a position to be worrying about others.

"They probably want to save a place or city called Venera, right? If it's a drought or lack of food, we can still offer some aid. If it's an unknown plague, however..."

We try asking Zeta and Zisha what Venera is, but unfortunately we can't communicate, as expected. I even try using clumsy hand movements and ugly drawings to get the point across, but all that happens is that they get scared of me. Forget me, even Wolfram the artist loses his self-confidence, hugging his knees at the side and sulking.

"This messed-up looking puzzle should be 'hope', right? Mm... but what's supposed to be on the left is on the right, and there's even a stick in between. As education minister, it's really hard to allow situations such as this."

"Probably because they're not in the habit of writing letters!"

If it was half a year ago, the one surprised would be me, instead of Günter.

Having lived in Japan for 16 years, I would never have imagined that there were people who didn't know how to write. To us, we have to learn not only hiragana and katakana, but also kanji and the English alphabet, even some simple English. It's normal for us to be able to greet people or name dishes in several languages. But there are still people on this world who don't have the chance to learn languages, or are even forbidden to do so. The letter in my hands is the best

example of this.

How have Jason and Freddy survived until now? What kind of life are they living now? All these are unknown to me. The only think I can be certain of, is that they are seeking help from the mazoku.

I don't want to betray them, and I don't want to break our promise.

After meeting the ruler or party in charge of Shou Shimaron, let's see the situation and make contact with Seisakoku. Not only can we use this chance to search for the twins' whereabouts, we can also gather information on the place called Venera.

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By the time we reach the continent under Dai and Shou Shimaron jurisdiction, six nights have passed.

The last time I set foot on this land, it was purely due to coincidence, but this time it's different. This time I'm here of my own free will, even resorting to stowing away to get here.

Last time, our point of departure was the Gilbert Business Port then we crossed Caloria, heading north following the Longerbal river. But this time, we're here as the Special Ambassador from the Shin Makoku, so we are directly led into Saralegui Memorial War Port.

Since we had informed them of our arrival earlier with the 'Red Pigeon New Satellite Communications', the local government has already agreed to let us land. The 'Red Pigeon New Satellite Communications' is three times faster than normal pigeon mail, but they still tend to forget their special position and mix in with other groups, causing slight accident, and to the birds, that isn't a mistake of the youth. To the customers, although it can be inconvenient to use, they have no other choice if they want the extra speed, what a dilemma!

Thankfully, the red pigeon arrived at its destination safely, and so 'Friends on the Sea' successfully enters the port. This place is completely different from the Gilbert Business Port, there aren't any luxurious ships in sight. All the large vessels docked inside, are armored warships.

Saralegui Memorial War Port.

That name is familiar to me. That's the name of the original cropped-ponytail Nigel Weiss 'Will Never Die' Maxine's most respected liege. Who'd have thought he even put his own name on the facilities? Normally, monarchs don't tend to do stuff like that while they're still alive. If I don't have much confidence in my own accomplishments, I really wouldn't dare to have my name on anything. Such as the Shibuya Yuuri Memorial Sports Centre, or the Shibuya Yuuri Baseball Musuem, etc.

It feels even more awkward.

Writing your name on everything, just like a kindergartener would. (He doesn't know him yet and he understands him very well)

"What's the matter, Yuuri? Shaking with excitement at the thought of facing the enemy? No wonder, Shou Shimaron caused us mazoku a lot of trouble in that war twenty years ago, didn't they? Just thinking about it makes even my veins expand with adrenaline. This time, we'll definitely decide who's the male and female!"

Wolfram spiritedly says the lines you'd say when you're being pulled into Miss Anissina's next experiment, while the 'Special Ambassador of the Shin Makoku with Full Authority under Orders of the Maou', Lord von Christ reminds him,

"What are you saying, Wolfram? You should be on the ship now, you're only here as His Majesty's bodyguard since security in the capital is meager. Therefore, I hope you don't say or do anything rash, lest you get in our way. Please, carve that into your mind."

His Highness the Prince LEVEL-1 immediately pouts angrily.

Of course, we can't let Shou Shimaron know that the Maou is in this little visiting group. Although the war ended nearly 20 years ago, our relationship is still very tense. If the opposition's king boldly waltzes onto their land without any prior notice, forget angering all the people of the country, the worst case scenario is that they might use lowly methods to kidnap said monarch, using him as a condition to threaten the Shin Makoku... that's what smart Günter said.

I think he's worrying over nothing, though.

"Your Majesty mustn't let your guard down too much. Once we enter

Saralegui City, you won't be able to have servants by your side as you usually do, Your Majesty must pay attention to this. For your safety, there is still the need to disguise your true identity. Therefore..."

We are given the title of the Special Ambassador's personal chefs. Although it's a lot higher level than a dishwasher boy, we're still wearing the kitchen apprentice's uniform. Since it's a blue collar uniform, logically speaking, the other kings shouldn't want to meet me.

"Aah~ You look exceptional in these clothes, Your Majesty! The pure white top brings out your noble aura, the apron covered in oil stains expresses your liberal nature, full of natural humor. In the past Your Majesty wore mainly black, I never thought that white would also suit your black hair--"

"The way I see it, as long as I'm not completely naked, you'll praise whatever I wear anyway."

"If Your Majesty so wishes, I am also willing to praised your naked—Mm-kya!"

"More like that's your wish, isn't it?"

Wolfram gives the perverted-looking Günter a hard kick from behind. The blonde-haired green-eyed pretty boy's white clothes are completely different from the weird no-nationality cook's get-up I'm in, he's much cuter in comparison. On the tip of that white chef's hat of his, I can almost imagine a tiny bird about to take flight, singing a crooked song.

Having transformed ourselves, the three of us get onto a high-speed horse carriage prepared by said country in the Saralegui Port. The odor of hairballs make me peek outside, finally realizing that the carriage is being towed by a few dozen sheeps. Can you even call this a horse carriage?

On horseback all around us, is the men from the Shou Shimaron Royal Secret Service. Can you even call this a secret?

And then the one in charge of leading the way today, is the little bit amongst the forest of green, the Royal Bison Squad. Are we running a marathon here?

"Bison... White bison... Otherwise known as the 'Shiro-Bai'^[1]... Mm--"

The land route from the war port to the capital Saralegui takes twenty days'

time. Even if the high speed horse carriage goes non-stop at full speed, the most we can shave off is half that time. During the day we speed down the highways, and in the night we stop by a hotel by the roadside to rest. The good thing, though, is that the hotels are really classy, just like the ones you'd see on a travel show.

All the misery from before feels like a dream now, this really is an elegant and praiseworthy journey of luxury.

Soaking in the hotel's famous health hot springs, there really is a 'We^[2] are Satisfied' atmosphere around, and I even start humming to myself subconsciously.

"Mm—This really is heaven on earth. If I knew it'd be so comfortable, I should go travelling with Günter from now on—"

"Your Majesty said such kind words... Oh, yeah—Günter is over the moon... Oh, ye—Mmph!"

"Hey... you okay? You've been puking a lot, right?"

The sad thing even Wolfram, with his powerful maryoku, has a splitting headache and horrible nausea. To Günter, whose maryoku is even more formidable, the airsickness bag seems to be an essential. Seems like it's because this is human land, where humans worship the gods, so it's full of houryoku or something, making them highly uncomfortable in enemy territory.

As for me, having been made of Earth DNA, my skin has become smooth and supple due to the effects of the hot spring. You could say I'm in perfect condition.

Just when those two poor pure-blooded mazoku are reduced to lying still on their beds, a little spark of adventure spirit lights up in me, and I set off on a journey of discovery around the high-end hotel. I'll say it now, this is not a perverted Peeping Tom plan, neither do I want to use this opportunity to try out the mixed bath, I just want to determine where the escape route is!

"...So why do I stumble across a big pool, now of all times?"

A wooden sign hangs above the Japanese-style block windows, and carved in the Shimaron unique yet illegible creative writing—

“Male and Female Mixed Bath.” [3]

I don't feel safe enough just looking at it with my eyes, so just for precautions I touch it again with my hands. It does indeed say Mixed Bath, I definitely didn't say it wrong. So I put my towel onto my shoulder without a second thought, and sneak from the wide open changing area to the sliding door that leads to the pool. That is the flowery world of a men and women mixed bath. Even if it's full of those big sisters back then who later changed into big brothers, the sixteen-year-old man, Shibuya Yuuri will never regret it!

“Bath...”

White steam saturates the air, so I can't see where the pool really is. I didn't think that it'd be so lively this early in the morning. Add that to the echoing from the walls around us, and I can't quite recognize what noise that is. There's the sound of water buckets knocking against each other. I can feel someone desperately scooping water. And then there's that signature hot spring smell, sharp yet makes one look forward to its healing properties.

“Is it full?”

“Mm-moo-hoo! Mm-moo-hoo! Moohoomoohoomoohoo--!”

...Moo-hoo?

I open my eyes as wide as I can to stare, and find that there are countless hairballs floating in the middle of the huge pool.

“...Are those mineral deposits from the hot water?”

“No~ they're not.”

There's a woman soaking alone in between the white, beige and light-grey hairballs, the water reaching her chest. Her expression is relaxed as she stretches her arms over the sides of the pool, but that shoulder-length hair with that unique color and that jazz singer's signature husky voice are extremely familiar to me.

“No way... Why are you here?”

“Who'd have thought that we'd meet and greet in a place like this, Your Majesty? It's been so long since we met, so why aren't I getting a warm

passionate reunion hug?"

He is a member of the Shin Makoku Special Forces, the crossdressing, orange-haired, perfect body for an outfielder, the man with the thousand faces, Gurrier Josak—lips currently curved in mischievously. And when I said ‘special forces’, I don’t mean the crème de la crème kind of elite squads. In his case, his missions are all really ‘special’, so special I have no idea how to describe them.

“Welcome to the grown sheep’s nighttime social area—the Male and Female Mixed Bath!”

“Mm-moo-hoo! Moo-hoo-moo-hoo-moo-hoo--!”

“Waa--!”

Josak stretches his arms wide open to show his hearty welcome, and suddenly a sheep pokes its head out from under his armpit, mooing. Those curved horns are directed straight at me, and it even pants out a threat.

“I-it’s a sheep... Sheep bath.... This isn’t a mixed bath at all!”

“Eh? Your Majesty, haven’t you noticed yet? This really is a male and female mixed bath!”

So you mean not a men and women mixed bath, but male and female MIX? And there are attractive members of the opposite sex just before you, it’s a big bath for boosting your body.

“Ah, ha, ha! What a bother—The sheeps are going into heat one after another!”

“W-why is there such a low grade hot spring—Ah! How can you mix with these beasts so casually?”

“Really! Your Majesty, you look so cute panicking over a few little lambs~ And I am a beast to begin with~”

“...Josak...”

Weren’t you a fan of mountain goats^[4]?

Just thinking that this sort of person in a first grade soldier in my country, makes me want to question Lord von Voltaire about our army’s discipline. Right

now, all I can do is hide my embarrassment with the towel, hanging my head in silent despair. Josak on the other hand is happily waving at me, seems like as long as we don't provoke them, the sheeps won't simply attack.

"Aiyo, Young Master. You rarely get a chance to go into a mixed bath, so you should soak yourself up to your shoulders and warm yourself up!"

"You—Why are you in Shou Shimaron--"

"Your Majesty, that's naturally because I'm the Shin Makoku's number one intel agent! Did you see my Red Pigeon message? That was about Shou Shimaron's urgent diplomatic plans. The Shin Makoku may be wide, but the only company who can get something so special, is none other than I, Gurrier."

"Gurrier... Is this your new girl character? You really beat me there."

Actually, as long as you can stand the sheep odor, this hot spring is pretty comfortable. The temperature here really is something else. And according to Josak, the sheep essence in the water can help moisturize the skin.

"Actually, I'm here to determine the credibility behind their urgent diplomatic plans, y'know!"

"I saw you enter the hotel. Your Majesty has some moves—you actually wore couple clothing with your fiancé~"

"Ow ow! Stop that, Gurrier!"

Sitting beside me, he lightly taps my side with his arm. Then he immediately returns to the professional soldier's tone, turning the topic back to his mission. Though the walls here have the Sheepy Corporation's ears, sheeps have no interest in mazoku matters.

"I don't understand what you meant by 'determine the credibility', though, is my intel false?"

"I'm not suspecting your intel, but Miss Anissina did scoff at it."

"Mm—So that's it? Darn that Anini!"

Anini? The unfamiliar nickname sends a chill down my spine despite the warmth of the water. Josak tilts his clean-shaved chin, saying,

"Just because her CUP isn't as big as mine, she's held a grudge until now."

"Wait a second, wait a second, just you wait a second. Miss Anissina may be small, but she still has a bust, y'know... That's not what I meant! Yours must be 90 per cent muscle. Ah, not that either!"

"But Your Majesty, a man can easily get a C cup. Or is it because I didn't report it personally, is that why she's upset? Mm—but that isn't Anini's style. Besides, the reason I couldn't go back is because other than the urgent diplomatic plans, I heard that there's some internal conflict as well... What's the matter, Your Majesty? You look so cute with your mouth hanging slightly open!"

"Ah, you called her Anini, and you said it twice."

"Ohh~ That? Does your heart feel uncomfortable?"

"Why would it? I'm just suspicious, Josak, don't tell me you two are secretly dating?"

"Lady von Karbelnikoff and me?"

The self-proclaimed seasoned spy, His Majesty the Maou's 0043 throws his head back and laughs heartily. Although his nickname is like a telephone number, but not only can he crossdress, he can also run rings around men.

"You must be kidding, of course we're not secretly dating!"

So he's denying the 'secretly' part? But I don't dare to ask him, 'Then are you publicly dating?' At this moment a hairball slides past my nose, turns out there's a white and a grey competition sheep enjoying a one night stand by the poolside.

"By the way, Young Master, there's more to the results of the investigation. I decided that rather than sending another pigeon back home, it would be faster to report it face to face, that's why I'm here waiting for you. Seems like His Excellency GünGünGün's powers have dropped a lot due to his dizziness, though."

"Mm, Günter and Wolfram have been completely defeated, looks like it's because their maryoku is too strong."

Josak looks at me with a complicated gaze, then says,

"Never mind, one day you will naturally understand. For now, forget about

those two inexperienced greenhouse mazoku. Since the situation is urgent, let me cut to the main topic... about the urgent diplomatic plans.”

“I know.”

What he means is the issue of Shou Shimaron restoring relations with Seisakoku. On one side is the human country we fought against during the Great War, and on the other is the shinzoku country which had been locked away for the past 2000 years. I’m not sure how shinzokus are different from humans, but once the two join forces, it’s no laughing matter to us mazoku.

“There are some people in Shou Shimaron against it though!”

“Well, that happens to the political state in every country, right? Fully unanimous decisions only happen in dictatorships!”

“But Shou Shimaron was a rather united country not too long ago. What’s really surprising is that everyone’s very supportive of His Majesty Saralegui, who ascended the throne two years ago at the tender age of 15. Con—My friend called it a leader’s charisma... He’s an expert at capturing his ministers’ hearts, and he rubs, kneads and hammers them in the palm of his hand without once letting go.”

Seems like he’s a king good at massages, but he is also a very young king. If two years ago he was fifteen, he shouldn’t be any older than seventeen now. Ruling a country at seventeen years old, now that’s an impressive feat, not to mention the country he’s ruling is as big as this, it figures that there would be no end to his worries.

“That’s equal to someone in the second year of high school—Poor thing, working so hard at such a young age--”

Josak looks at me with a surprised gaze again. Then he clears his throat slightly and continues the topic of conversation.

“That voice of opposition is still very weak, true, but no matter how weak it is, they’re still trying hard to make their point. Wasn’t there a line, ‘what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger’? And because their organization is small, it’s easy for them to adapt to situations. That’s why the government can never catch their tail, or catch and bring them all to court at once, because there’s no way of

luring them out at all. They tend to hide underground and operate secretly, so the government can go ahead with their diplomatic plans. But those guys seem to be on the brink of starting their operations. That's why I said Shou Shimaron's current situation is rather urgent!"

"When you say 'operation'... What kind of operation? Don't tell me it's a revolution to overthrow the country or an armed political uprising?"

"About that, it's something faster... like assassinating the king..."

The gas lamp that had been dimly illuminating the pool suddenly swings a little, causing the light to dim some more. Beside me, Josak's whole body tenses instantly, then he quickly yet quietly stands up.

"...Ah--..."

Wordlessly I tilt my head and watch closely. Because an unwelcome guest is coming towards us from that direction next to me.

Now the flame grows immediately stronger, and the pool returns to its usual brightness. Looks like it was all just a matter of the wind blowing. The culprit who brought the breeze in appears from the sliding door. The other party reveals only a pair of slender, long and beautiful legs while the upper half is wrapped in a towel, entering the bath area.

Completely unfazed, the stranger shows off fair limbs, and slowly walks through the mist towards us.

In my heart, I've thrown my arms up, tearfully yelling, "Mixed baths, banzai!"

"Mixed baths, ban... pff!"

Josak takes the wet towel he had just been using to cover his important powers and puts it over my head. Waa~ Don't do that, Gurrier, it's very... very dirty! And the warm water even got into my eyes...

The third guest with the beautiful limbs and skin, descends into the water a distance away, at the end of the giant pool. The way the tips of those toes slide into the pool first, is literally torture to a young man's eyes, specifically one who hasn't had any luck with women for sixteen years. Because the other is too graceful and gorgeous, I've completely forgotten to complain about 'showering

first before soaking'.

But we have to watch our manners in public areas, and always remember to wash yourself properly before entering a bath...

Before I can start nagging, the stranger starts making flirty movements again. Like slowly stretching to determine the temperature of the water, or sighing sexily with that throat. The pale gold hair that was bundled up above the neck cascades down on both sides, landing on the surface of the water with a small noise. And that skin, so fair I can clearly see the Adam's apple, makes me want to say, "If it's already so soft then there's absolutely no need to soften it some more!" Just like that, my gaze is held fast.

After humming a song in an unfamiliar note, the third guest sighs deeply, and says in a voice like a girl's,

"This hot spring is really comfortable~"

Hm? Like, a girl? Adam's apple? Adam's...

"...It's—a—guy—after-- all..."

I sag my shoulders in disappointment, while Gurrier touches my back, saying, "You still have me." Thank goodness I didn't nosebleed just now.

"Soaking can moisturize a person's skin and soul. This is Shimaron's ultimate culture, y'know. Sheep baths are especially wonderful, do you agree?"

"...Yeah."

"Why the long face? Don't tell me you don't like Shimaron style hot springs?"

He cocks his head slightly, asking me with a smile. Face to face, I notice a pair of really small glasses perched on his nose. And the lightly-colored lens is of course fogged over. Just when I'm asking 'why do you wear glasses even in the bath?' in my heart, perhaps he notices my confusion, and explains smilingly.



"Oh~ It's because my eyes are sensitive to heat and light... I'm weird, huh, talking like a child even though I'm obviously no longer one."

"Oh~ But I know an eighty-two year old guy who acts like a child."

Problem is, I will automatically deduce that people with glasses are smart. Although if I don't get rid of that stereotypical opinion, I'd be too mean to Nobita.

The weak lamplight makes his eye color indeterminable, but likewise, he probably can't tell mine either. He uses a pretty finger to brush the hair on his face behind his ear, and though the rest of his hair had been piled atop his head, it still drops down fairly easily. Looking deeply troubled, his brow is creased as his lips curve, and he looks exactly like a graceful pedigree cat.

In other words, he's a pretty child. Although I say child, in truth his age should be close to mine, at around 16. Looking at the way he walked on the porcelain tiles, his figure seems similar to mine too. But I'm more muscular than him, and my bones bigger.

Logically speaking, I should have long since grown immune to pretty boys, so why do I still feel my heart pounding? Especially since I have the ultimate example of a pretty boy right next to me!

"But it's not the same... completely different... there are no similarities at all..."

"What?"

He leans closer to me, asking me as though he's my friend.

"N-n-n-nothing, nothing at all."

Wolfram is a pretty boy just like an angel, his blonde hair and emerald eyes the color of the bottom of a lake would never give anyone a feminine impression, even those beautiful lips he inherited from his mother only prove to bring out his strong personality. Lord von Bielefeld is like the sunlight, making people want to run together with him, making it hard not to notice him.

As for the third guest soaking in the pool beside me, he's like the gently dark moonlight, if you ask whether he has the beauty of a young girl... Actually, just observing him for ten or twenty seconds will refute that conclusion. But everything about him has an aura of neutrality, and none of the roughness of a man.

For example, his fingers. Those slender fingers are elegant in shape, and the fingernails he holds out even have a light shade of pink, the type that wouldn't look at all out of place holding a cocktail glass with the pinky sticking out. Those hands of his have never held a bat, oh, wait, I correct myself in my mind, they've never held a sword.

“But still, why am I surrounded by nothing but pretty boys~”

“Aw, Young Master, how mean. Gurrier will be embarrassed—”

In many ways, his words are too presumptuous.

“So that one is called Gurrier?”

“Yes, because a relative on my mother’s side is a chef.”

His Majesty the Maou’s spy 0043 [5] is already an adult, so he won’t be attracted by the charms of neutrality. Still unable to get used to such stimuli, I can only repent while at the same time showing respect for this quality of his.

“I know, it’s an Eastern name, right! Do you have relatives in Dai Shimaron?”

The third guest, who doesn’t know a thing about Josak’s background, is happy to find a similarity between them.

“Like my grandfather, he was born in Dai Shimaron too, I still have distant relatives there to this day. Oh, yeah, please call me Sara, it sounds friendlier this way.”

“Sara? Why does the name also sound like a girl... Sorry, what I said was too rude. I’m called, uh—”

Revealing my true identity to a pretty boy I just met in the pool, doesn’t seem like a smart thing to do. So I try to think of a fake name on the spot, but all that comes to mind are weird ones. Is it okay to use the characters I played in the past? Like Mitsuemon or Colonel Crusoe.

“I’m Cru...”

He presses my open mouth with his beautiful fingers; and those eyes with the unreadable color looks amused through the thin little lens, as though saying, ‘let me guess’. His gentle and graceful expression makes me completely unable to refuse.

“Your Majesty Yuuri.”

Even though my shoulders were just in the hot water, now they’re cold to the point of shivering.

“I’m right, aren’t I? There’s no need for you to report your glorious name. You

are my most precious guest, Your Majesty Yuuri. Who'd have thought you would visit my Shou Shimaron? It never even crossed my mind."

"You are..."

The question on the tip of my tongue is immediately swallowed back down, didn't he just tell me his name?

Sara.

Completely unafraid to say the name of the powerful country, the young man similar in age to me, is the king of Shou Shimaron who ascended the throne two years ago, Saralegui, turning seventeen this year.

Josak grabs my arm and pulls me to his side. Like a replacement trick in a magic show, the guard is instantly standing between me and Sara. Although we're all in a hot spring, a cold sweat is beading relentlessly on my temple. I use my dry and stiff tongue to force out a simple sentence.

"You know, my, name?"

"There shouldn't be anyone who doesn't, Your Majesty the double black Maou."

The omniscient lord and ruler, Saralegui of Shou Shimaron, is using his beautiful fingers to push his hair behind his ears.

References

1. ↑ The name of the white bikes traffic policemen in Japan are known for.
2. ↑ Yuuri uses the first person pronoun for kings
3. ↑ The "male and female" part of the sign uses the kanji "雄雌", which means "male and female" for animals. If it was for humans it would be 男女. So technically they did mention that there would be animals in there.
4. ↑ Since he was talking about baseball, it could be a reference to Johnny

Spencer from the Pittsburg Keystones, or any other player with the nickname 'mountain goat'. <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/player.cgi?id=spence008joh>

5. ↑ 043 is the dialing code for land calls to Chiba.

Chapter 7

Seeing me return together with Josak, Lord von Christ's face turns extremely pale, add that to my uncharacteristically solemn expression, and he assumes that I've met with some sort of danger. But that baseless worry doesn't last very long, before it turns into another problem.

"I heard Your Majesty met the Shou Shimaron king, Saralegui?"

"That's right."

"In the pool?"

"Yup."

"But why would he show up in this kind of highway hotel..."

Of course he would feel confused, but what I have to say next is even more shocking.

"And then, Günter... We've been found out."

"What? What's been found out?"

"The fact that I'm the Maou."

When he heard that, forgot his gaze losing focus, he practically turns the whites of his eyes. First turning pale then turning the whites of his eyes, he really is a busy man.

"H-h-h-h-how did things come to this? Don't tell me Your—Your Majesty revealed your identity of your own accord?"

"Of course not, I'm not that stupid yet. He just saw through me. Logically in the foggy condition of the bath, he shouldn't have been able to tell the color of my eyes. Josak immediately covered my head with a towel too. But we still got found out easily. Maybe I have some other mazoku quality besides my hair and eyes?"

"It must be... Your Majesty's beautiful appearance and noble aura, and the perfect parts that the lower class people can never even hope of having..."

"No, the only one who thinks so is you."

Beside us, Saralegui fixes his hair with his slender fingers, saying,

"Anyone can see you're a king at first glance."

I had even started suspecting if it was due to the maseki on my chest, but it isn't a national treasure. If this stone was a legendary item that other kingdoms knew about, 'he' wouldn't have simply given it to me.

But, we don't have any time to spare to slowly figure out our worries.

Because by the time I finally manage to change into my clothes, Saralegui's messenger is already standing by the door.

He passes on a declaration, "His Majesty wishes to dine with milords".

What will come has come, we're going to have breakfast with the king of Shou Shimaron. Dining with a hotshot isn't something you can deal with just be saying, "It's really delicious~" or "Thanks for your hospitality—". That's to say, this isn't just a simple gathering and meal, it's actually an invitation to a summit of leaders with toast in front of us.

We were meant to have a few more days before reaching the castle in the capital Saralegui, and it ever occurred to us that we'd face our challenge on short notice in this hotel, so we didn't have time for any mental preparations whatsoever.

Besides, the dueling card now has changed from Günter versus Saralegui, to me versus Saralegui. The saddest part is Günter, who was so ecstatic to be appointed "Special Ambassador of Shin Makoku with Full Authority under the Orders of the Maou", has been abruptly pulled down from the main character's seat. Just thinking about that, causes his cold sweat and tears to flow nonstop.

Anyway, we head towards a small restaurant that was booked ahead. Being a very thorough person, Saralegui is even waiting for us at the entrance, watching from the far end of the corridor. He is the honored ruler of a large country, but his personality is really quite straightforward. I say with a tone of sympathy, as though it has nothing to do with me, "The men in charge of protecting him must have it hard!" But for some reason Günter actually pinches my nose.

“What did you do that for—”

“...Your Majesty, ask yourself, is it logical for you to say that?”

I give him a stare full of resentment. What, if you have any grievances, just say it! Don’t want to deal with the naggy education minister anymore, now’s the time to focus on the summit between two countries. I use the strings on my apron as a replacement for a tasuki^[1] and tie them tight, preparing the first sentence of greeting.

“Good morning, Your Majesty Yuuri.”

“Goof morning, Your Majesty Saralegui.”

Because this is my first ever high level summit, my words come out sounding strangled.

Meeting him again in a bright area, he’s still the pretty boy I imagined him to be. Just like at the pool, Saralegui is wearing pale colored glasses. Since they’re tiny things meant to protect his eyes, they don’t hurt his beauty at all. Overall, he still has a young girl’s slender figure, and fair smooth skin, so these aren’t illusions by the mixed magic after all.

The first thing that attracts my attention is his hair color. Silky gold hair cascades down his shoulders like a waterfall, sparkling under the morning sunlight. Different from Wolf and Madam Cheri’s honey blonde hair, his is pale, as though one drop of golden dye added to white. Although it’s easy to categorize them together, each has its own merits when you look closely.

What am I talking about, each have their merit, why do I sound like a pervy old geezer?

“Your Majesty Yuuri, I apologize profusely for inviting you over on such short notice.”

“I-I’m grateful f-for your g-gracious i-invitation... Ouch!”

Wolfram secretly kicks me, ah, calm down, me. Quick, remember when you were chosen as the substitute oath-declarer at the Summer Games, and how you practiced every day for it. Although since I was only the substitute, when it came to the actual day all I could do was sit and listen.

I have to be calm and carefully when conversing with this boy king, and try to find out what kind of character he is. Or perhaps to let Wolfram and Günter get a better picture, I should try and glean as much information as I can. Like whether he's a good guy or a bad guy, or if he's a person we can trust.

"...Likewise, likewise. I'm sincerely very happy we can have breakfast together, Your Majesty Saralegui."

The 'pretty' boy king curves his light red lips into a small smile.

"Let's not call each other 'Your Majesty' any more. We should be equal in standing, wouldn't you agree, Mr. Yuuri?"

"I never requested that you call me Your Majesty, Saralegui."

I actually called him without even an honorific. Although my pretense at calmness is still holding, the truth is I'm a nervous wreck inside.

But no wonder. The enemy is a natural born royal, receiving kingly training since childhood, a boy who'd grown up watching the back of his father and previous king for seventeen years, a man noble amongst nobles. In comparison, I'm surrounded by ministers who desperately praise me, and a throne I got like from a lottery. I have absolutely no idea what the tricks to leading an entire people are at all.

Though I have met other people of high stature in the past, like Mr Hyscliff and Belar the Second, but back then I wasn't using my true identity as Shibuya Yuuri to face them, and was instead hiding under false pretenses. This is my first time going leader to leader, king to king one-on-one like this. This time what I say might be taken as the opinion of all the mazoku, if I lower my head now, then all the people of Shin Makoku will surely scorn me.

Right now, saying something comforting like 'just be who you are' has almost no use at all on the actual battlefield. If I can't show a power above average, then there's simply no way for me to be Saralegui's equal.

I desperately straighten my back, not letting the other party look down on me no matter what.

The pressure makes me feel like my butt just can't sit on the chair.

Firstly I must choose an appropriate tone of voice. The first person pronoun should be ‘we’, right? And stuff like when to show respect and when to show allowance must be noted. And instead of ‘have’, should I say ‘own’?

And yet all the mental preparation I did beforehand is instantly shattered. Because Saralegui suddenly gives me a warm hug, wrapping me tightly with his slender arms.

“Waa!”

“Really? Can I really just call you Yuuri?”

“...P-please call me that.”

While I’m trying to hide it on the outside, on the inside I’m screaming ‘Eeeeeeee—’ in embarrassment. Wolfram’s piecing gaze from behind makes me exceptionally jumpy. Instead of saying it’s piercing like a needle, I should say it’s like a roaring flame of jealousy. No, wait! It’s not just a glare, he’s pinching me too! My butt hurts like hell where he pinched me!

Saralegui doesn’t notice our little movements under the counter, pure and innocent him pulls my hand like a child and says,

“Come in, we can chat inside. By the way, why are you dressed in a kitchen apprentice’s clothes?”

“Because I’m in the middle of stowing away, so I can’t change my clothes.”

“Stowing away?”

Saralegui starts laughing lightly.

“Even the king has to stow away? Shin Makoku is so interesting. But that long apron looks really good on you!”

I don’t tell him that in fact I was planning to pretend to be a professional chef, and feign ignorance while I eavesdropped on the conversation between the Special Ambassador and the king of Shou Shimaron.

Just like all the secret negotiations happen over the corporate lunchtime or in high class restaurants, we eat as we talk. But because I’m naturally slow, I was never able to multitask. So even though the table is covered with a luxurious breakfast, even a glutton like me is in no mood to eat.

There's another reason my appetite declined, actually.

Aside from the soldiers standing guard at the entrance and Saralegui's personal guard, there are a few more of his men in the room, and one of them is a familiar face.

He has Shou Shimaron's standard hairstyle and a textbook beard, plus a drawn, wan face and thin single-lidded eyes. Maybe it's due to his appearance, but rather than saying he gives off an overall impression of strength, it'd be better to say he's like a sharp weapon. And last of all, there's that memorable army uniform of yellow and blue crossed, as well as that cheek with even more scars than last time.

This person is the king of Shou Shimaron's loyal lapdog, Nigel Weiss Maxine.

His is the real Cropped Ponytail, but I've already given him a cute nickname.
"Ah, it's you! Crop Pony!"

Crap, I actually said it out loud...

Maxine is the man who made Caloria hell on earth. If it wasn't for this man using a royal decree as the starting gun, ridiculously performing experiments, that tragedy in the south east area of the continent wouldn't have happened—As in, using us, on the north bank of the Kalongba river as guinea pigs, and activating the most evil of all weapons, 'Ends of the Earth'.

And not using a wrong key from goodness knows where, either.

...It was that certain someone's left arm.

Speaking of experiments, I wonder what those experiment partners are doing now? Is Gwendal being played around like a toy by Miss Anissina? Maybe he's even letting loose blood-curdling screams now? I try to think about the happy life I led in Covenant Castle, but seeing the worst man in Shou Shimaron, I can't relax no matter what.

At this moment, Josak taps the arm I'd twisted behind my back lightly, and Wolfram is frowning slightly to. The only one who doesn't recognize Crop Pony is Günter. But today'd Nigel Weiss Will-Never-Die Maxine isn't the same as usual, he's blinking nonstop, and that's just too unnatural. Those thin lips, usually

curved into a cruel smile, are now twitching oddly, doesn't it feel like the sense of defeat of someone who's failed so many times he was scolded, and even branded as 'useless' within his country?

"Eh, you know Maxine?"

"Of course I do."

A taste of bitterness welling from deep within my throat, the fist I'm gripping so tightly shaking uncontrollably. If it weren't for Wolfram sitting on my right, stopping me, I would have long since grabbed Maxine's shirt and pushed him to the wall.

"It's this scum who turned Caloria into hell on earth."

But the one who ordered Maxine isn't anyone else. It's the king of Shou Shimaron, Saralegui. Ad that same man is right before me now, even smiling gently.

"Speaking of that, Caloria even accepted Shin Makoku's help during that crisis. I'm really grateful for your side's aid and assistance, so here I'm representing Caloria's appointed ruler in presenting to you my gratitude. After all, back then that was still my territory.

I really don't understand the true meaning behind those words. Did he purposely take the extra effort to say that? Or is he sincerely grateful? But when I see his innocent smile, I naturally accept his words.

"Technically, it's what we were supposed to do anyway. Although we could not lend a hand in time, but we were willing to offer financial assistance, only to be rejected by Flynn Gilbert. Of course, we still have manpower and machinery standing by there to this day, so we can give our help at any given time. Now we're just waiting for Flynn to soften up... Oh, yeah, she's already the leader of an entire country, seems like I shouldn't simply call her Flynn anymore."

He shrugs his shoulders like a child who was scolded, making him look even younger than his actual age.

But no matter what, the one thing I can't forget is that he's the true mastermind behind this entire incident. Getting the wrong key and box, then ordering Maxine to open it, it was all him, the king. Is he trying to hide his own

guilt? Or maybe he doesn't know I witnessed everything on scene?

"Saralegui, what do you think the reason behind the tragedy in Caloria was?"

"Of course I know."

"If you know, then how can you still be so--"

My angry, shuddering words are suddenly interrupted.

"I'm sorry!"

Saralegui suddenly puts both palms onto the desk. And lowers his pale golden head.

"I'm really very sorry. Although everyone knew that a terrible calamity might strike once we open the box, especially using an uncertain key, making the power even more impossible to control. We even knew that by doing this, we could never get the desired result, but still..."

Without raising his head, he continues yelling, leaving no space for anyone to interject.

"Ever since we got the box by some unique chance, I've told my men time and again, to guard the box carefully, and utterly. Its overwhelming power is indeed very attractive, but I understand clearly that we humans have no way to control a power that defies the laws of this world, surpasses the human intelligence. But I still... could not believe in the power of a legendary box. I thought that man could overthrow the gods, and that victory in war comes not from some box, but from the power of humanity. I thought that the people and all my men understood me, and agreed with me, were willing to follow me..."

I'm completely subdued by Saralegui's presence. Forget fighting back, I can't even open my mouth to agree.

"But a few of the more superstitious soldiers... could not fight the temptation of that power. They were attracted by the holy power of the 'Ends of the Earth', and brazenly took action without considering the consequences... No, they did it for the country, and for the people of Shou Shimaron. But still, whenever I think about the terrifying outcome, I know I can't just turn a blind eye to their crime. Even though it's the sudden action of a few soldiers, but I had noticed long ago

yet failed to stop them, so I should take up all the responsibility, the responsibility that I, who had failed my duties as king, must carry. I was only watching the country's land and borders, but I failed to grasp my minister's hearts. This happened because I(informal) ... I (formal) could not reach them. As a result, the violent soldiers ended up doing such a dreadful thing... Don't you think so, Maxine?"

The Crop Pony standing by the window side, his shoulders are shaking really violently, and he's biting his lip without a word.

"Why aren't you replying?"

Another Shimaron soldier in the room scolds him in a low threatening voice.

"...Your Majesty's words ring true."

Maxine replies straightforwardly, making me unable to shut my mouth which had already taken on an 'oh my god~' shape. What happened to you, Crop Pony? Why are you so serious and well-behaved today? Purposely speaking slowly and menacingly, isn't that the specialty of the real Cropped Ponytail?

This isn't the Maxine I know. Besides, he deserved it, I'm not gonna pity him.

"He is repenting to this day. After his successor is determined, he will personally pay for his sins. To make it up to the people of Caloria and the south-east area, I've given him the heaviest possible punishment, but..."

The agitated Saralegui suddenly slows down, a barely suppressed anger in his words.

"The problems that he caused you. Must be repaid here."

Nigel Weiss Maxine slowly raises his head to peek at his master's expression.

"This stupid man cannot expect forgiveness, but at the very least he hopes you will accept his sincere apologies, right?"

The expressionless man's face only twitches a little, and the same light that shone in his eyes when he yelled Saralegui's name that day flits through them again. But that light quickly vanishes. Becoming a deep brown tinged with despair.

The man's master orders him in a cruel voice.

"You must apologize to Yuuri, Maxine. Kneel, take his shoe..."

I think, 'Don't tell me he wants him to lick my shoe?' and take a surprised half-step back, preparing to reject him solemnly.

"...and put it on your head."

So at the end it isn't licking, but putting on his head? That's a weird way to apologize, is this the Shimaron version of a kneeling apology? But, how should I say this, mn—It still counts as a culture exchange between countries, if doing this can solve matters, I can still take it.

I get it now, to make some problematic men obey and respect you, you have to show a strong and forceful attitude like this. This makes me respect him and scold myself at the same time.

After a bit more comparing, I realize I'm actually really lucky. I'm surrounded by people who call me a noob yet let me do as I wish, and people who frown deeply yet are still willing to take the suggestions of a rookie like me, and people who nose bleed while desperately giving me courage, and people who love crossdressing but helps me through underground work. And when I first came to this world, and was feeling uneasy, there was also a person who took even better care of me than anyone else.

When I'm desperately trying to escape reality, a wordless and cool-gazed Maxine has already taken one slow step forward. This forces me to try and take a step of equal distance backwards, I really don't want him to do that—and from the look of things it's obvious to see, that the person accepting the apology feels even more humiliated than the person apologizing. If it weren't for Saralegui, I would have rejected something so embarrassing from the start.

Crop Pony with his special beard, approaches me with an even paler face and staggering steps. The other three mazoku aside from me too are afraid of a fraud, watching with nerves tightly taut. But then the human man filled with despair falls to his knees with a stance as though sticking his body to the floor, and his forehead is so low, it almost touches the ground.

Wolfram hurriedly says in a small voice,

"...What are you doing, Yuuri?"

"Eh, I put my shoe..."

Crop Pony lifts my right foot up high, then takes off the chef's shoe. Then he puts the thin-soled and lightweight leather shoe on his dark brown ponytail with a 'pah'.

"Didn't he say to put it on his head?"

"It shouldn't be like that, right?"

"Feels like he's wearing a hair ornament."

"I told you it's not like that!"

"But Wolf..."

I turn my head to look aside, and realize that the man who was staring at my naked right foot is now raising his head, so slowly it makes me impatient. He slowly raises his turbid gaze.

"You got the wrong guy."

I take the shoe away from his head, the dust left behind there making me feel slightly guilty.

"The one you should be apologizing to isn't me. To whom you must make it up, and how, you should know better than anyone else."

At first I touch his head with the intention of knocking the dust away for him, then to hide my own sense of guilt, I have to rap down forcefully instead.

"I'm right, aren't I, Nigel Weiss Maxine. Honestly, even I feel embarrassed. Maxine!"

Crap, I actually said it out loud.

Perhaps having noticed my red ears and face, Josak grabs Maxine's hand and pulls him away from me, opening the door and chasing him out of the room, even saying a few short words to the Shimaron soldiers at the door.

The one who ordered the apology, Saralegui, must have been really nervous too, because now he releases a deep breath as though there was a weight lifted off his chest.

"Every time something like this happens, I wonder if I have what it takes to be

king... Guess I don't have the leadership skills you do, huh. Yuuri, I really envy you, and the citizens of Shin Makoku who have such an impressive king!"

"There's no such thing! It's not like that, Saralegui!"

No, this is 180 degrees away from the Saralegui I imagined.

"Quick, raise your head. You've just been on the throne for two years, you're only seventeen, right? To rule perfectly is impossible, it's impossible regardless of who is king. Besides, Shou Shimaron is a large country, and I heard there are even complicated racial problems."

"Because of the invasion."

Wolfram mutters in a voice only I can hear.

"S-so, it's impossible to properly rule an entire country. Like me, I'm a rookie king through and through. Until now I still don't understand exactly what a king's supposed to do! It's because I have excellent comrades helping me. That's the only reason I could hold on until now. If there was even one of them missing, our country might have fallen long ago."

The difference is too much! The enemy in my imagination was a natural-born royal, having been taught the kingly ways since young, a man prepared to be king of a country. One with a mysterious charisma! A professional king who can capture the hearts of his men, then rub and knead and beat them without letting go! Technnically, it should be like that!

"There's no such thing as the perfect leader, Saralegui, you can't take everything onto yourself!"

Come to think of it, someone like me who'd been lucky to win the throne, why am I worried for the boy king of a country with tense relations and no deals with us?

Or is it just like Miss Aninssina said, and Shin Makoku's intel department is for decoration purposes only?

"Thank you. You really a nice guy, Yuuri."

"Mmph!"

Saralegui raises his head to look at me, the eyes behind those lens already

moist.

“Mmm! Nah... I’m really not as good as you think!”

If I don’t do anything, it’s highly likely that he’ll start yelling ‘stupid stupid stupid, I’m so stupid!’ while knocking his head on the wall.

“I believe the people of Shin Makoku are really lucky too.”

“You’re wrong, Saralegui!”

The truly lucky one isn’t the people of Shin Makoku, it’s me.

“Your Majesty.”

One of the soldiers still in the room whispers into his master’s ear—it’s the guy who scolded Maxine just now. This man has a regulation cropped ponytail too, but his hair and beard color make him seem gentler than Maxine. And I think compared to Crop Pony, he seems closer to Saralegui.

“I know, Storob.”

His name is Storob, please pay attention not to get it mixed up with ROAST BEEF^[2].

The boy king nods his head softly, then stands in front of the chair he pulled over, saying,

“We’re going to talk about more serious stuff from now on, can I ask that everyone be seated? Although I said it’s okay, my men are still a little worried.”

Maybe it’s because he’s too skinny, so he doesn’t have a lot of stamina.

That’s what I was thinking. Eventually everyone takes their places, and just as I’d guessed before, the ones standing by are all men in soldier uniform. This really is a breakfast conference with a heavy atmosphere and muscle men.

Although there are enough chairs, Josak still stealthily moves to the door. The seating isn’t arranged according to our positions. That’s why I’m seated between Günter and Wolfram.

Saralegui, whose appetite is as small as I thought, raises a glass filled with what looks like orange juice.

“Then, we can’t just be talking about the Box and Caloria, I’m sure that’s not

your only goal.”

It’s the opportunity we’ve been waiting for. Günter asks immediately, “I know this question is rude, but why did you go to a normal hot spring hotel like this one? Shouldn’t we approach you for a formal interview first?”

Saralegui gives him a glance and then turns his gaze back to me instantly. I look back at him, and realize that there’s a smile even in his solemn expression. Looks like his mood wasn’t affected. Or maybe he just didn’t want to listen to someone who was never introduced.

“Saralegui, Lord von Christ is a very capable prime minister, and one of the most important people in Shin Makoku. He understands more things than I do, so I let him speak on my behalf. Just treat Günter’s opinion as my own.”

I planned to introduce everyone beside me at once. So I turn to Wolfram. But he shakes his head slightly. He narrows his emerald eyes, even creases his stern brows, the picture of hostility.

I’m scared that there’ll be another storm to face when we go back to our room, so I do as he wishes and spare the introductions.

“I know he is your confidante. But I just want to talk to you, Yuuri, and not... any other stubborn mazoku.”

“Stubborn...”

Special Ambassador Lord von Christ is at a sudden loss for words.

What to do, Günter’s brain juices are boiling over. If so, I’d better end this first conference quickly.

“I know, I know, Saralegui! Just talk to me then, we’ll have a summit. An ‘Exciting Debate, Raw Egg at Dawn’, I can be Tahara Soichirou [3], okay?”

I stretch out my pointer and middle fingers to the boy king sitting opposite me.

“There are two topics to discuss this time. One is why are you as a king here at a commoner’s inn? Although it is still kinda fancy here. And one more... I’ll be blunt with you, because I don’t plan on beating round the bush. The other thing is about Shou Shimaron’s urgent diplomatic plans. Is it true that you are actively trying to contact the country under lockdown, Seisakkoku? Because we will take

the appropriate measures according to your answer. Although I don't want to ruin your mood, but in case Shou Shimaron plans on joining forces with Seisakoku to attack the mazoku, that's more than just bad news to us."

Saralegui nods as he listens to me, seemingly without any intention of interrupting.

"Then let's begin with the first question, why are you here at the hotel? Why didn't you wait for us in the city? Isn't just a few days' difference? Or is it inconvenient for us to meet at the capital?"

"Didn't I tell you? I hope you'll just call me Sara, it feels friendlier that way."

After giving me a disappointing answer, Saralegui puts down his glass of juice. His fingers are really beautiful after all, it wouldn't be a problem even if he were to be a model.

"Because both these questions are related in cause and effect, please forgive me for not being able to reply you in order. But the reason we're here, is because we guessed that our guests from Shin Makoku would surely be here. After we predicted the course of your journey, we decided on this place, where we were certain we would encounter you."

"I see."

"I guess you must be wondering why I couldn't wait for even those few days? Are all Shou Shimaron people so impatient? The answer is no, but we really don't have the time. If we waited until you reached the castle to start our journey, we'd never be on time. We plan on departing from this country two days later. Yuuri, we've decided to set sail from the Saralegui War Port your ship had arrived in."

"I se— Set sail? Don't tell me—?"

Saralegui clamps his mouth shut, lacing his fingers across his chest as he says, "To Seisakoku."

"What detailed preparations."

More offended than surprised, Günter scolds softly. Maybe the people from Shou Shimaron didn't hear him, probably.

"This is probably what you wanted to know, Yuuri. Does Shou Shimaron plan on starting relations with Seisakoku? The answer is 'that's right'."

While I'm still hesitating on how to react, a sigh escapes my lips. The biggest mystery has been solved too abruptly, leaving me feeling suddenly weak. I take a hand complete different from Saralegui's, one full of baseball calluses, and bring it to my forehead.

"...Is that so?"

"Are you unhappy?"

"Nah, at least not now."

After many letters sent back and forth, we've decided on a date with the other party. Although we are neighboring countries separated by an ocean, but the journey to Seisakoku will take a fair amount of time. According to the detailed navigation plans taking past weather conditions and marine routes into account, if we don't depart from Shou Shimaron within these ten days, we'll surely be met with seasonal winds and currents. So, Yuuri, I really didn't have the time to wait for your arrival at the city... But it really is a pity."

The eyes behind the lenses narrow mischievously. When I was thinking he was talking about something serious, he immediately says something cute. As the king at the helm of a large country, who knew he'd be so childish. Although he's one school year older than me, he's the type that makes you want to stay by his side to console and encourage him on.

"What do you mean by 'pity'?"

"I really wanted to take you around my castle. Now's right in the middle of the second blooming season, so the garden's really pretty. If only I could take you around it, I'm sure you'll love it."

"Is that right, that sounds nice."

I'm not paying a lot of attention to Saralegui's words. Instead I'm distractedly thinking, 'things are gonna get busy again'. Since the intel about restoring relations turns out to be true, then Shin Makoku must take the corresponding measures. After all, if a land shut away for 2000 years decides to have a special relationship with Shou Shimaron, then the other countries, starting with Dai

Shimaron, will definitely not stay quiet about it.

Of course, Shin Makkoku can't just stand by and watch either. I'm really not good at diplomatic discussions, no, instead of saying not good, I should say I'm basically clueless. Guess if it was Günter and Gwendal, and the other Ten Nobles plus all the other high-level officials, they'd surely react violently, then start discussing nonstop in meetings.

"Please answer me, after this trip would you come stay by my castle for a few days? You're in no hurry to return home, right?"

"Yeah."

Although it wasn't my own intention to interfere with other countries' matters, but my country can't stay out of this either. Whether the results are good or bad, this world is a competitive world. With my mathematics results, contemplating national economic matters is no easy feat, but when it comes to a sales market, bigger is always better, right? Mmgh, my head is already starting to hurt, looks like I'd better get back quickly and hand this over to the experts.

"Sorry, I think I should return immediately after all..."

"Don't be like that, Yuuri. Didn't I just say I wanted to take you around my garden? Didn't you agree to stop by my castle after this trip? If you want to go back on your promise, I won't let you in my ship!"

"Your ship?"

Did he mention a ship just now?

On both sides, Günter and Wolfram won't stop knocking my knees. It hurts, it really hurts!

"I don't understand your signals!"

"Don't go back! Just don't go back for now!"

What? That's too mean, Wolf, is that what the officially-recognized fiancé should say?

"We'll stay for now. We agree to stay a few days in Saralegui City after you return from your trip!"

Since when did the overprotective Günter get so agitated that even he'd reach out and betray me?

"Mm? What are you guys..."

"That's why, please bring us along on this trip to Seisakoku!"

I haven't even completed my sentence, and Günter has already promised the other party.

Although he's the Special Ambassador I myself chose, I have absolutely no idea what he's saying. Is Lord von Christ forcing Saralegui, whom we've just met, to take us to Seisakoku?

"I say, Günter, even if they mean well, doing this is just too shameless—"

"I don't mind, y'know!"

"Is that right, you don't m... Saralegui?"

The boy king makes a bold statement with a nonchalant expression. No wonder they say a man is as good as his name^[4].

"Although I only welcomed Yuuri, but if he does not wish to travel alone, I can allow the other two to board the ship with us."

In other words, he's willing to let the three of us tag along in the Shou Shimaron ship on the diplomatic expedition to Seisakoku? I can almost hear the super bishie yelling 'banzai' three times inn his head.

"Sara... You really are too kind."

"I'm nothing compared to you, Yuuri."

He shows an angelic smile that won't lose to that stubborn kid. In fact, now he looks more like an angel than the third son, who'd suddenly changed into his oldest brother.

And then I collapse onto the back on the chair, feeling completely drained.

How did I do in my first ever leaders' summit? If the full score is 100, my performance should be 127, because no one made any noises of protest. I suddenly feel like going out and soaking in the sun, whistling.

When I finally get out of the overwhelming sense of relief, the hunger hits me

like a hammer.

"Phew—Since it's rare to have such a lavish breakfast, then I won't hold back—Though it might have gotten cold by now. Wolf, pass that jam over there to me!"

Just when I'm holding a toasted piece of bread in one hand and reaching out for the purple jar—

An unnatural commotion comes from the corridor. Josak, who was standing by the door, moves his back away from the wall and his hand to his waist, before remembering that everyone's swords had been pulled into a corner. So he heads across the room with a 'tsk'.

Günter and Wolfram stand up too. Everyone looks towards the same direction.

The only ones still seated are Saralegui and I, opposite to each other.

"I say, Saralegui, I heard a shocking rumor. There are extremists against your rule..."

"It's true! Yuuri."

Just then, the door crashes open, followed by hurried steps of boots on the stone ground.

"What is this?"

A familiar voice.

"What's with the security here?"

"...Conrad..."

Günter murmurs the name of the one who was once my confidant.

Lord Weller, who had barged in, tosses a bleeding soldier away.

Except for a certain someone, everyone's gazes land on him, with his sword unsheathed and covered in blood. And I remain with my back towards him. Staring at the sky outside the window.

I don't see the need to turn around.

Because he's no longer the man I once knew.

References

1. ↑ A tasuki(襷) is a cord used to tuck up the sleeves of a kimono.
2. ↑ ストローブ (Storob) and ローストビーフ (Roast beef) share many of the same syllables.
3. ↑ A Japanese newscaster with the morning news, debating on many social issues.
4. ↑ Sara sounds similar to ‘sarari’, meaning decisive.

Chapter 8

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Lord Weller throws down the soldier on his shoulder, and releases the other man he had dragged in with his left hand. The army regulation coat is stained black from the shoulder to the chest, who knows the blood of how many people it took for that. There's even some white substance on the unsheathed sword, that's fat, you know.

Basically I don't want to look at him, but I instinctively turn around out of concern for the wounded.

They're all wearing the yellow and blue striped Shou Shimaron army uniform, one was chopped on the back, the other completely degutted, both silent.

"...Are they dead?"

"No, both are still alive."

Wolfram squats down, pressing his fingers to their jugular before replying. Finally, I find my voice to continue,

"Are they dead? Hey!"

I kick aside the chair and step in between the two men, carefully touching the young soldier. His body is unnaturally cold.

"I saved the soldiers who were left outside the door, but there's still conflict at the main gate. Although the guards are brave, the overwhelming numbers aren't in our favor. What's happening, king of Shou Shimaron? Why has it come to this?"

"Who are you?"

Saralegui steps in politely.

"It's okay, Storob. He is the ambassador from Dai Shimaron."

I simply use my ears to listen in on Lord Weller's interrogation of Saralegui, but my eyes never moved away from the soldier before me, and my fingers move

slowly towards the wound on his stomach.

"I was wondering who it is, turns out it's His Majesty Belar's new favorite, Lord Weller. As you can see, there are the kings from two countries in this room, I was hoping you would show at least the most basic manners, but to you, I suppose it's pointless to speak of this now."

"You are correct, it is pointless now."

I leave only a small part of my brain to hearing their duel of words, then I put my hand on the casualty's body. When the tip of my pointer finger touches the open wound, my white fingernail is instantly stained red, while the flesh of my finger brushes against a completely unreactive body. A wave of stimuli like a current darts around in my body, and the voices in the room start becoming distant.

"I come to the capital under His Highness' orders, only to find the entire city empty upon the king's departure for vacation. It took me all the way to the port before I could catch up, but then I find the hotel surrounded by swords and spears, and they're soldiers wearing the Shou Shimaron uniform, in other words the attackers and defenders are all in the same uniform... Your Majesty Saralegui, I hope you can explain what the matter here is. Because I am bound by duty to report this to His Highness Belar."

"It is as you see. Lord Weller, this is an internal conflict, if only on a smaller scale. Because they're against my diplomatic plans, so they want to use drastic measures to prevent my leaving for Seisakoku? The reason they're wearing the same uniform, is because they're all Shou Shimaron soldiers."

"If so, Your Majesty Saralegui, as king of Shou Shimaron, do you plan to ignore the internal conflict here, and leave the country of your own accord?"

"I didn't think that he would care so much about such trivial matters in another country, His Highness Belar really is an extremely generous man!"

Saralegui says in a theatrical tone.

"O Ambassador from Dai Shimaron, I ask you not to worry. Today the soldiers taking the opportunity and their uprising, is well within our expectations! This is a great chance to catch the rebels who had previously worked on too small a

scale all at once.”

Saralegui steps lightly to the window, peeking downwards out through the glass. But then he returns to his usual second in the next second! Goes to show that his exaggerated attitude was just a hoax.

“After the battle dies down, let’s leave. We’ve long ago prepared a secret tunnel in anticipation of these circumstances.”

“Secret tunnel?”

“One made especially for royalty.”

“Looks like I’ll be tagging along as well.”

I subconsciously turn to the speaker. Who is this ‘I’?

Saralegui reveals an elegant smile like a young girl’s, then says something completely contradicting his smile.

“Is that His Highness Belar the Second’s orders as well?”

“That’s right. Whenever there is a suspicion of improper conduct, Dai Shimaron has a duty to invigilate Shou Shimaron. You should be well aware of this, Your Majesty Saralegui.”

“What a bother.”

The boy king sighs, lightly shrugging his slender shoulders and arms. He cocks his head slightly, and the pale golden hair originally gathered around his neck instantly floats down.

“You plan on boarding my ship, don’t you?”

By now I feel as though his voice is getting further and further away, and my head has become real dizzy. Even my consciousness is beginning to blur.

A vague pain travels from the tips of my fingers to my wrist, then to my arm, spreading throughout my entire body from my shoulder joints, following my blood vessels to my brain, feet, heart...

“What are you doing?”

Suddenly I feel a strong impact. Wolfram’s high voice is almost like a wail, and he even grabs my shoulders, shaking me violently.

"Yuuri what stupid thing are you doing now... Are you trying to heal these two?"

"How is that... stupid?"

I just want to do what I did countless times before. Just help them stop the blood a bit.

"Has the bleeding stopped? Didn't you help me do this before..."

My tongue feels clumsy, my words slurring as though I'm drunk. When my hand is forcefully pulled away from the soldier's body, not only am I unable to squat down myself, I practically fall backwards as though having slipped.

"How many times have I told you, it's very dangerous to use maryoku on human land! How are you, does it hurt anywhere?"

"I forgot about that long... Ah, my head—so dizzy. Wait a sec. Actually I'm not in that much pain, it's just I'm—really—dizzy. Wait a sec—I'll be—fine in a moment."

Truth is, it hurts to even talk. I lean the back of my head on Wolfram's chest, desperately trying to suppress the pain under my eyes. That pain is like the ache you get before a cold and a fever, it's agonizing just trying to move a finger.

My half-assed maryoku probably couldn't save even one of them, huh? It's just like someone said a long time ago, maryoku isn't everything. I stare at the beautifully embroidered silver wallpaper as I contemplate, hearing the clash of metal and yells of the soldiers vaguely from outside the building.

In front of my hovering gaze is the figure I missed to the point of wanting to cry.

It's Conrad.

He creases the scarred eyebrow slightly, looking at me as though he wants to say something, yet hesitating. Although I can't hear his voice, but I can read the too-familiar word on his lips.

Yuuri.

Having lost my sense of self-control, I do my best to lift my hand, heavy as a stone--

Who cares what color his clothes are!

The color of his clothes doesn't matter at all!

Conrad's knee moves forward, and his right foot is lifted from the ground. But in a moment something bright grey blocks my line of vision, and I can no longer see his glowing silver irises.

The piercing sound of metal then reverberates throughout the room, flying sparks disappearing behind the table, where the light cannot reach. My mind is functioning at a lower capacity than normal, so I can't understand what's happening, and it takes me a long time to realize that those are the sounds of battle. Using his unsheathed sword to parry the first attack, Gunter jumps behind me. Only then do I realize that the bright grey thing that had blocked my view was his back.

"If you take even one step closer to his Majesty, I won't hold back!"

"Are you serious, Günter?"

Right now, all I can hear is Conrad's wavering voice, and the sound of blades changing direction. Lord von Christ's long hair slides down to his upper arm from his shoulders.



"You dare deny that you are the dog of the opposition? For all we know, you are the assassin Dai Shimaron sent to kill His Majesty the Maou and set back the mazoku!"

"I had no idea Shin Makoku's envoy would be here."

"Who would believe a traitor like you!"

Günter's aura as he dashes forth follow the wind back down to where I am,

quick and so sharp it almost cuts my cheek.

"You are no longer a member of Shin Makoku! Completely different from us, who've sworn our loyalty to the Maou!"

"Günter, even so. I have no reason to cross swords with you..."

"I do!"

The rare attack that thrusts from the bottom upwards cuts off the tip of Conrad's sword.

Stop, Günter! That isn't something you would do!

Come to think of it, I really haven't seen this royal instructor go physical. I know he specializes in maryoku and IQ. But how are his fighting skills? Faced with Conrad, a sword master for eighty years, would he be killed for his deliberate provocation?

"...Stop... Stop them, Wolf. Won't it be bad if he gets hurt on human soil? Damn, why won't my head stop spinning..."

"Who are you saying will get hurt? Conrad?"

"I mean both of them, but it really is rare to see Günter use a sword."

I raise the head I was resting on Wolfram's chest, trying to break free from his grasp. If I can't stand, I'll walk over there on my knees, or crawl there. I must stop this battle before either one of them gets hurt.

"If they're serious about this..."

Wolfram notices what I'm trying to do, supporting me with both hands as he says,

"It should be hard to tell, although it might actually be Conrad at a disadvantage."

"What?"

"You still can't move about like that! Don't bother so much, just let them fight it out!"

"But Günter can't use maryoku here, right? So you're saying that on sword skills alone they are completely evenly matched? And hey, you, the other one is

your brother, right?"

Surprisingly, Wolfram looks relaxed, saying in a shocking tone,
"If it weren't for you fainting right now, I'd do anything to run up there and
take Günter's place, and I think Gurrier feels the same way I do."

"Take... Take whose place!"

"Aren't you the same? If you don't whack him a couple times, you'll never be
satisfied."

Take a baseball bat and K him a couple times.

"...He'll probably get grievously hurt."

Why am even I thinking such scary thoughts.

Saralegui, on the other hand, is still leaning against the window pane, looking
at Günter and Lord Weller with interest. His expression says that he is watching
as a bystander, but there's no confusion or contempt there.

I immediately pull my gaze away from the boy king and back to my men,
because there's a cringe-worthy sound of clashing metal coming from the battle.

The curtain-less windows shine in the morning light, and the blades gleam
silver. From my position, it's easier to follow the path of the light than the actual
movements of the sword.

"I didn't teach you everything I know just so you can wear this uniform!"

I'm jolted back to reality by Gunter's words of agony.

I almost forgot, Lord von Christ is an educator with students all around the
country, it's no wonder he was given a military position although he's not a
military man. Even though the current situation is so tense, but just imagining
him as a demon trainer in the past, makes me laugh out loud.

Wolfram, who is long used to battles, mumbles the moves they're using, while
Lord Weller takes the opportunity to parry aside Günter's sword. Although it has
nothing to do with me, but I still start worrying if the destructive power of the
weapon itself will make a difference.

"Then why do you raise soldiers? Is it so they can die an honorable death on

the battlefield?"

Lord Weller's voice is colder than the dueling blades. On the other hand, Günter's words seem more agitated, the emotions displayed by both sides feel completely different.

"I live to raise soldiers who are loyal to the country, Shinou, and his appointed His Majesty the Maou, until the very last moment..."

"And most people do as you wish, don't they?"

Suddenly there's a 'clack', then deep and short sounds of impact. Compared to the clanging of metal against metal, their battle now has become much more dangerous. Because their power had nowhere to go, now it's directly reached their weapon and arms.

Lord Weller curves the corners of his lips. I don't know if he's smiling or not. Can't read him at all.

"Don't be too greedy."

"Why... Didn't I teach you to be His Majesty's sword and shield?"

Right now all I can see is Günter's back. That shiny light grey robe of his, floats gracefully with his every move and the track of the blade that I can vaguely see, is like a dancing with a sword.

The two long swords cross in mid-air, making a faint sound of friction. Their sturdy hilts overlap, so close their faces are almost touching.

"...You should stay by the Maou's side."

"I give those words back to you, every one, because only the most honest of men can accomplish it."

Lord Weller's light brown eyes darken, then he forces open the eyelids that were going to close.

Then he uses the part of the hilt that juts out, causing his opponent's blade to sink deep inside, before turning around quickly. He's not using brute strength, but the power in his arms.

At that moment there's the sound of glass shattering, instantly reverberating

the air in the room.

Günter's sword, having been broken from the roots, falls to the ground dully.

"Looks like that is not a weapon made for war. And also, Your Excellency the Royal Instructor... Lord von Christ, you don't seem accustomed to killing people."

A cold sweat has broken out on my palms, my nails digging so deep they leave marks. I grip my fist so tightly, using so much force even I feel the pain.

"Ah!"

Slowly, I regain strength in my legs. Putting my palms on my trembling knees, I force myself up. Finally, success!

When I turn to face them, Günter with just a hilt in his hand, is using the grip to pry away Lord Weller's sword.

"That's enough!"

I move before Wolfram can grab my clothes, rushing in between the two men. I throw my arms open wide, with my back facing Günter. I know who I should be standing in front of now, who I should be protecting. What I'm doing is right, absolutely not wrong.

"Your Majesty!"

Upon hearing the words leave his mouth, Lord Weller himself looks surprised. As he frantically tries to pull back, he loses his balance and falls unseemly.

"Enough for you?"

"Your Majesty, have you any idea how dangerous that was? You need not protect me! In the middle of a heated battle, please don't..."

"Stop talking!"

The hand that was reaching for my shoulder is suddenly pulled back.

"You started this, so don't go preaching there all self-importantly, Günter!"

"Y-yes, my lord."

"And stop arguing in front of me, looking even more childish than I do! For

someone long over a hundred years old, you're still so childish! And where do you think this is? This is the location of a summit between the leaders of two countries! Look at Saralegui, so mature and serious. Do you know how much older you are than him?"

"I'm... very sorry... Your Majesty."

Günter sags his shoulders and apologizes, while beside him Lord Weller sheathes his sword, making a hearty 'ke-chang' sound.

And then, I stand facing him, hiding my emotions deep within my heart before raising my head to look at him.

"About my subordinate's insolent actions towards Dai Shimaron's ambassador, I am deeply sorry, it was our fault."

"...We were just playing around, please don't mind."

After our mild conversation, Saralegui claps his hands thrice. The sound echoes around the high ceiling, then sinks downwards.

"Such an interesting situation is rare indeed, although I have no idea what went on between the teacher and student over there."

He walks over to me slowly, then grabs my arm with his slender fingers, "I don't wish for my hard-earned friend to get caught in the crossfire, so I plan on evacuating this place, and Yuuri's coming with me. If you have no intention of protecting your king, go ahead and continue with your charade."

"W-wait a second, Sara!"

"Yuuri, let's go. This is a secret tunnel, doesn't that sound exciting? I always wanted to take this kind of tunnel as a kid, but grandpa butler wouldn't let me adventure around the tunnels in town."

"...You even have a butler?"

As expected of a natural born prince, I didn't even have a nanny. Before I can voice my opinions as a commoner, Saralegui grans my hand and jumps into the furnace.

"Eh, w-w-w-w-what?! A Star Tour without water?!"

“Careful, Yuuri, don’t bite your tongue now.”

“Haaah ih dah theh aaah (What is down there aaah), uyaaaaey--!”

We slip down a long slide in the darkness. My butt hurts, and because friction creates heat, it feels like it’s burning to a crisp. Instead of calling it a secret tunnel, it’d probably be better to say it’s a hidden roller coaster.

The tunnel suddenly reaches an end, and we’re tossed into the air, before landing onto our tailbones on the dusty ground. The air here smells musty, but it isn’t unbearable. And then my companions fall onto us, one by one.

“Oorgh”, “Ump-rgh”, “Pu-argh”, “Gaaah”—they should be about as heavy as a million stones.

“That hurts—Get off! Get off now!”

The small animals hiding in the darkness squeak as they make their speedy escape. Before my eyes can get used to the darkness, I use my hand as a substitute to feel my way around, and when I touch the ground, I find and pick up a smooth and dry sphere.

“Whose is—Waah-lee-leh!”

A lit torch approaches, and I realize that the thing in my hand is an old dry skull.

“H-h-h-he’s dead, so we’re facing a deadly area ahead! W-wait, Saralegui, this is the way, right? You aren’t Indiana Jones, are you?”

“Of course it’s right. This used to be a kitchen, that’s probably leftovers.”

I shouldn’t have asked. Then, this is an ape, an ape, right? Otherwise no sort of gourmet would use human bones to make a soup. Or maybe this guy is a member of the kotsuchizoku, and we can use his ‘bone signaling’ to contact home.

So I gather my guts and grab its lower jaw, making it clack and trying to leave a message.

“Old pal, time’s up. I mean, good fellow, we’re currently underground. We, who believe in ancient creatures of legend, are now in an old abandoned tunnel, and headed deeper inwards.”

No reply, guess it's just a normal skull, after all.

The passionate Royal Instructor who's always keen to impart his wisdom, calmly explains.

"Your Majesty, that's not a kotsuchizoku. Although they particularly enjoy being buried or left in the surface, they extremely hate underground passageways with cobwebs."

"Aiya!"

The cobwebs that the kochi, otherwise known as the kotsuchizoku, are now tangled in my hair.

"Yuuri, this way!"

An excited Saralegui waves at me from ahead. It took me forever to get used to the darkness, and now I can vaguely see his pale skin.

Just as Günter accidentally trips and has to be caught by someone in front, I notice Lord Weller is following directly behind me. He looks hesitant, and after a moment he speaks to me in an overly formal and distant tone. His face is still trained forward, though.

"Are you okay?"

Maybe he thinks that speaking softly can avoid the others overhearing, but I too face the sparkling distance, which may be the exit, instead of looking his way.

"Perfectly fine."

"His Majesty Belar the Fourth is also very concerned about you."

"That's right~ He's your 'Your Majesty', right."

"After all, the parting that time in the desert was rather disconcerting."

"Please pass on my apologies, for making him worry."

This is when Saralegui turns back again.

"Yuuri! It's the exit, see, I was right!"

The person waving at me, king of Shou Shimaron Saralegui, and Sigourney

Weaver^[1] with the childish voice, otherwise known as Dai Shimaron's His Majesty Belar the Fourth, are actually on opposing sides. Saralegui must escape from Dai Shimaron's control, and His Majesty Belar the Fourth always wanted to defeat his uncle. If someone were to ask me who I wanna help, for now I'll definitely say Saralegui.

"Are you getting along well?"

"Yes."

"Is that so? But he is...!"

Conrad never finishes his sentence.

Because having noticed that we were whispering to each other, Günter is running our way, hair flying everywhere.



Under the almost-noon sun, the outside is extremely piercing to the eyes. When we push past what looks like a manhole, we come to the back of a little hunter's cottage in a forest. Thank goodness for the long and winding underground tunnel. We've come such a long way we can't even hear the voices of the soldiers.

Storob and another Shou Shimaron soldier release the horses that were previously tied together. Saralegui looks at the only one simple carriage and asks,

"Can you ride?"

His words bring back painful memories, and I heave a deep sigh.

"I can ride, but I can't make the horse move."

"Same here, then let's take my carriage. It's slower than riding horseback, but at least it's much safer."

"Thanks. But if I'm alone, my companions will worry... Günter, I'm here! Can they get on the carriage too?"

"Of course, it takes a day and a night to get to the harbor. We can't rest on horseback, but we can take a breather in a carriage. Oh, yeah!"

Since Storob is occupied, I have to take his place and help Saralegui onto the

carriage. He weighs as much as a kid, seems like the bona fide prince is slender from head to toe.

"Lord Weller isn't taking the carriage too? Aren't the two of you close?"

Crap, he found out.

"Ahh—but—"

I glare at Günter, meaning 'it was all your fault!'. But since I've automatically turned on a water heater myself, I guess I have no right to blame anyone else.

"His riding skills are superb."

"Is that so? Then that makes him feel much more dependable."

His reply seems to be insinuating something.

"Come to think of it. He... seems to have a brother who looks a lot like him."

I don't know what Saralegui is trying to find out, so I can only pretend not to hear him. Thankfully he doesn't continue asking.

More importantly, what does 'look a lot like him' mean?

If he meant a brother who is 'surprisingly similar', then we just happen to have a pretty boy right here staring daggers at us.

References

- ↑ Sigourney Weaver is an American actress and film producer, best known for playing Ellen Ripley in the Alien franchise. Here's a link to her Wikipedia page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigourney_Weaver

Chapter 9

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The Saralegui Army Port we arrived at a few days earlier, is still blanketed under a tense atmosphere. It's different from the business ports here, all the vessels docked are navy ones, so the monotonous and dull colors can't be helped.

But there is one particularly eye-catching ship.

"There wasn't such a luxurious vessel before, huh."

Waiting for us is the meticulously prepared, shiny sparkly golden Shou Shimaron royal ship.

The goddess statue praying for good luck on the helm of the ship is smiling gently, while there's a Shimaron flag billowing on the tail end. The body of the ship is a shade of deep green that goes well with the waves, the windows and rims are hand-carved and inlaid with gold. If they unfurl the yellow and blue striped sail on the amber-like wooden mast, then this ship would surely be as beautiful as a butterfly sailing on the seas. Another ship docked next to it looks real shaky, though, making the flagship all the more magnificent. Looks like the cargo ship is headed for Seisakoku too.

"We must come prepared with a variety of things when dealing with others."

So, the cargo on that ship must be either bribes or presents? As expected from someone who graduated from the School of Kings, he thought of bringing gifts on a visit. That's why he's different from me, and knows how to prepare for every eventuality.

Walking up the long gangway ladder, I can't help but be continuously in awe of the ship's grandeur. All I'm doing is voicing my honest thoughts, and to Saralegui, that's definitely not a displeasing thing.

"It's so pretty—Does it have a name? Like SS The Queen or something?"

"The Golden Salmon'."

“Ah?”

“It’s called ‘The Golden Salmon’, isn’t that a wonderful name?”

Golden salmons... To be honest I prefer red salmon, its natural enemy should be the bears around Alaska.

Just when everyone else is being led into the luxurious cabins, Lord Weller is the only one who politely declines boarding ‘The Golden Salmon’, choosing another mode of transportation on his own.

“I’ll just ride that cargo ship.”

“That one? But it’s already filled with cargo, and the feeling of sleeping on cargo can’t be good. Won’t it be more comfortable in the flagship?”

“I don’t mind about comfort during the journey, after all I’m neither royalty nor nobility.”

The ambassador from Dai Shimaron wordlessly heads toward the worn-out ship.

“...He’s weird, is it because he doesn’t want to ride on the same ship as us?”

His words have me suddenly breaking into a cold sweat, and I even think that he’s realized Lord Weller’s origins. Because Günter suddenly went crazy just now, Saralegui knows his nationality; but about his background, how much does Saralegui know?

“About that, I’m not so sure either.”

As we climb up the gangway side by side, Saralegui stares directly at me.

“Do you plan on starting this voyage dressed like that?”

Although it’s not unsanitary, but I’m still in a personal chef’s outfit. The long apron all the way to my calves may not be that convenient for walking, but it does help warm up my legs and knees.

“Sorry, I’m not wearing a tuxedo. If it were army uniforms, there should be suitable ones on our ship. But it’s all right if Wolfram was in uniform... Problem is, I’m not a soldier.”

“There’s nothing to apologize for, it’s just that voyages on the sea tend to have

temperamental weather, be it the wind or the strength of the sun, it's all different from when we're on land! That's why, if it's possible, it's best to prepare a coat that can wrap up your entire body."

But now there's not much time left for Captain Sizemore, who's docked on the opposite end of the jetty, to get a change of clothes. Actually I really want to go back to the ship and check up on Zeda and Zisha too, but since they say the high tide now is ideal for setting sail, the few of us who lack geological sense can only agree.

At this moment, Saralegui takes off his cloak, and shoves it at my chest.

"If it's all right with you, wear this. It's my usual cloak, and if you wear a hat with it then you can block out the wind completely. Since we're not that different in size, I'm guessing it'll fit just fine on you, and I have several more cloaks anyway."

The light blue cloak he's giving me is made of a shiny and smooth material, you can tell it's quality goods just by touching it.

"Really? Geez! I keep making you worry about me!"

"I'm glad to be able to help you, y'know. Crap, sorry, Storob is calling me. We're setting sail soon, can you board first and wait for me?"

Having been called by his soldier subordinate, Saralegui jogs back onto land. On the way he even turns back to look at me, a child's smile on his face.

"Oh, yeah, Yuuri, before we leave the bay you can stand behind the helmsman and enjoy the view! When the front of the ship squeezes out of the narrow bay, that feeling of awe is something you never get tired of, I always stand at the back and watch!"

"Is that so—"

"And then we pop open some grape wine to toast the captain and the helmsman's skills, that's what we normally do on voyages."

"I see—"

Although it's a ship, but leaving the dock must be as tricky as an airplane taking off. Getting complimented as soon as the mission's completed, must make the

experts really happy. So this is how he captures his subordinates' hearts! Who knew that staying by Saralegui's side would help me discover so many things worthy of respect.

Lord von Bielefeld brushes against him as he leaves, frowning. He probably doesn't think a trip for such an important reason isn't worth being so happy about.

"Günter asked me to give this to you, it might not fit too well."

Wolfram is also still wearing a kitchen apprentice's clothes, and there's a thick white jacket hanging on his arm. Be it the sleeves, the hems, or the decorations, everything is supersized.

"Oh! I don't need this anymore. Just now Saralegui lent me his cloak. Besides our heights aren't that different, the size should be a better fit than Günter's clothes... Wanna see?"

Wolfram scrutinizes the cloak inside out, even bringing it to his nose, like a little rabbit sniffing at the fabric.

"Mm--"

"Wolf... What are you sniffing for! Saralegui did take a bath, you know!"

"Give this one to me."

"Eh, why? He purposely lent this to me!"

I look the third son from top to bottom. He has a smooth face that has never gotten tan, and eyes as green as the bottom of a lake. Compared to me, whose constantly outdoors practicing, his skin is so white it looks like it can't bear direct sunlight.

"...On second thought, it might be better if you wear it. Alright, mm, you take it, I planned on getting more sun anyway."

Because he's so fair, I ask him to put on his hat, and even help him to cover up all his golden hair. Now he looks just like a light blue weather doll, and I can't help but laugh with a 'pfffft'.

"How is it? What are you laughing at, Yuuri?"

“Because you’re super cute... No, I mean, it feels like the weather will get better. If we hang you up like a lucky item, the entire journey should be sunny!”

“You want to use me as a live sacrifice, and pray for a safe voyage?”

“Not a live sacrifice, weather dolls aren’t live sacrifices!”

Then I turn my back on a displeased-looking Wolfram, and run off to tour the number one battleship in Shou Shimaron. Logically speaking, the equipment and firepower of the main ship are top secret military information, but there’s no one on surveillance duty here at all, Saralegui really is a generous king.

“Wasei—There are even cannons, but why isn’t there any gunpowder...”

A young passing crewman even tells me helpfully, that there’s a small scale catapult on board. Though they were our enemies twenty years ago, but in truth they are a bunch of friendly people.

The crew of ‘The Golden Salmon’ consists entirely out of Shou Shimaron soldiers. They’re wearing that familiar yellow and blue striped uniform. And they sport that even more familiar cropped ponytail. Everyone’s working hard and happily.

Just as everyone’s busily making preparations, Sunny [1] Wolfram walks over confidently. “Aren’t you cold? Either you get into the cabins or put on an extra layer, otherwise Günter will definitely pull you inside all nervous-like!”

“How is Günter? After losing to Conrad... Um—Is he very down?”

“Nah, he’s in a very good mood, in fact. Seems like it’s because you rushed up to protect him, and that makes him considerably happy.

“What, he sure recovers quickly!”

Wolfram rubs his frozen fingers hard, to get some temporary warmth. Maybe it’s because we’re by the water, so it’s fairly cold even though it’s not winter climate.

“He excitedly said that he’d come over as soon as he got his hands on the voyage map... Yuuri, I think it’s still better if we go in, right?”

But Saralegui said that before exiting the bay it’s best to stay on the deck and watch. And he said that the best position is behind the helmsman.

"He said watching the ship leave the bay from here gives an amazing sense of awe, and that it's a tradition when setting sail, as well as a highlight. Since it's such a rare chance, let's just follow our senior's suggestions."

Just as I'm putting on the excessive jacket of Günter's, the brass instrument instantly strikes up some loud music, like a shishi-odoshi^[2] that rang a few hundred times in quick succession. The people on the dock all look up, and watch the Shou Shimaron king's flagship—'The Golden Salmon' depart with reverent gazes.

Leaving behind the ropes and the gangway ladder, the anchor is slowly pulled up, accompanied by a deep rumbling.

After the ship makes a simple and short glide on the water, it begins to flow with the current within the bay. At first, it's towed by the manpower boat in front. Then, thanks to the adjusting valve set up in the bay, the helm of the ship is immediately turned to face the outer sea.

"Eh, is Saralegui on board already? Wasn't he called back onto land by his subordinate just now? I was even worried he wouldn't get back on time."

"Come on. How could a ship leave without its master?"

"Oh, yeah. You're right!"

'The Golden Salmon' moves with a smoothness bellying its large size, and begins to sail on the calm ocean surface. It's not as simple as going with the flow, it takes skill from the helmsman to make the ship move from parking position to sailing in a straight line. From Wolfram and my position, we can see the minuscule movements of the ship's wheel.

Behind us, is the tribute ship carrying Lord Weller and the cargo.

"That's odd..."

"What's up?"

I pull back my chilly fist to rub around my right eye. Because there's a medium-sized ship approaching us from directly ahead in the bay.

"Is it just me, or... no, it shouldn't be. I say, Mr Helmsman. That dark brown ship seems to be coming right at us."

"It's not just you. But, please don't worry, there's still a distance between us. Though it is odd that the first mate hasn't issued a warning..."

The middle-aged helmsman sounds very serious. Technically the first mate should be at an even higher position than the ship bridge, and should have made a warning upon discovering an obstruction ahead.

I help the helmsman peek at the position of the soldier with this duty, but all I see is a bulging yellow cloth.

"A human? Is that a human? It should be a sleeping or fainted thing instead, right?"

But the unassuming medium-sized ship is still headed straight towards us at top speed, the distance between the ships now close enough for us to discern each other's armaments with the naked eye. Based on Shin Makoku's navy, that would be a medium-level patrol ship. Standing in rows on the deck are people wearing the same uniform as 'The Golden Salmon', and a few sentinels are clinging tightly onto the mast that's currently lowering the sail.

This is bad. We're not filming 'Speed 2: Cruise Control' here, it looks like the other party is serious, and the situation is dire.

"Waa—Brake! Mr Driver, quickly, braake!"

"Calm down, Yuuri."

Just when I'm thinking 'we're gonna crash' and shut my eyes, bracing for impact, the body of the ship finally starts turning right. Turns out the helmsman had long since turned the wheel to make the helm change direction, but the patrol ship coming straight for us doesn't plan on turning. Since we'd turned right to avoid them, now all we can do is face them with the side of the ship.

"That ship plans on coming straight at us!"

"Hold on tight, keep low, and make sure to grab onto something!"

Amidst the panic on the ship, a loud and clear man's voice yells several times.

"They're coming! Everyone, hold on--"

Wolfram and I immediately hit the deck. Just then, there's a dropping tremor just like an earthquake, making our shoulder knock together. It's the impact

from the medium-sized ship crashing into the dark green belly of ‘The Golden Salmon’. And then there’s a shaking from left to right, increasing in intensity, until the sound of breaking wood brings the scene to a climax.

The amber mast tilts as the belly of the ship fills up with water.

“What’s going on?”

“I was gonna ask you! Why would a patrol ship that also belongs to Shou Shimaron crash into the king’s flagship? Mr Helmsman, hey—My Helmsman... but after such a crush, I guess even the rudder has been destroyed.”

The ship’s wheel has long since broken apart, and a huge hole has also been blasted into the entrance into the cargo bay just ahead. To successfully get up on the deck that’s now so slanted it’s hard to walk, we hook onto each other’s arms for support. Finally, we manage to get onto our feet.

Soldiers are running up and down all around us. Some are busy grabbing swords, some are raising their arms and directing others, some are running everywhere with buckets of water. Buckets of water?

“Your Majesty, you’re all right... Yahoo!”

Günter runs over, stumbling. Waves beat on the slanted deck, making movement even more difficult, and finally he accidentally steps on the hem of his robes and falls flat on his back. Tries to get up, and falls back down! Now bent over, he stares at his palm, and suddenly the super bishie’s expression changes drastically.

“This isn’t water, it’s oil! Oil’s flowing in!”

I stare at the top part of the slant, and see a man kicking down barrel after wooden barrel. It was the young soldier who had told me about the cannon and the catapult at the jetty, and now he’s raising his fist high, excitedly singing goodness knows what.

“...Why?”

Hearing the sound of the thick metal cable being hacked apart, I feel the air flowing strangely. It’s a wind carrying the pressure of intense heat, and not the naturally calm air.

“Günter! Take it off, take off your clothes!”

“W-what? Y-Your Majesty, don’t tell me you want do that kind of thing in this kind of place?”

Günter covers his chest with his hands. You’re already so old, there shouldn’t be anything to be ashamed of.

“Take it off now! Otherwise it’ll burn, it’ll ignite a fire!”

The bright red fireball in midair is cutting a curve as it approaches us.

That’s not majutsu or houjutsu. Over a hundred flaming arrows descend from the sky, rapidly igniting the oil on the deck, plunging the entire ship into a sea of scarlet flames.

The old soldier cries out, almost in agony. As for the younger soldiers with the shorter ponytails, they’re singing a certain man’s name.

“It’s Maxine, Maxine’s here--!”

“Master Maxine is finally here!”

...What about Crop Pony?

The weird thing is that medium-sized ship’s crew isn’t trying to board our ship. They’ve already made such a daring assault on the flagship, but now they’re not moving into a close quarter battle, what’s the meaning of this?

“Are you all right over there, Günter?”

Wolfram grabs my shirt tightly with one hand, clapping his mouth with the other.

“Y-you’re seriously taking it off?”

The super bishie is stripping his clothes off one by one, and doing it with gusto.

“Why would you say so? I’m always serious! Just like in my dictionary, ‘serious’ is pronounced MAZO (as in masochism)! That’s what His Majesty taught me! Wolfram, protect His Majesty before I get to his side. Your Majesty, Sizemore is on his way right now, before he gets here, please try not to fall into the sea...”

Oh, yeah, Shin Makoku’s pride and joy ‘Friends on the Sea’ was also docked in the Saralegui War Port. Once they see this huge fire, Captain Sizemore would

definitely rush right over. It's just a fire, putting it out would be a piece of cake, there's no need at all for my super Maou mode...

"That's right, after all he is the hero of the sea and the evening sea monster, Sizemore, right..."

At first I'd planned to drag out that last sound up a pitch, so I can get Wolfram's approval. But before the final sound reaches my lips from my throat, my breath stops.

A black line is aiming for my forehead.

If I measure the time with my G-SHOCK, it wouldn't be even one second. But it seems like an old recording out on slow-motion, slowly slicing through the air as it approaches me.

I thought I'd get hit; I thought the bullet that wasn't supposed to exist would go straight through my forehead, so I waited to be impaled without moving a muscle.

I thought it was aimed for me.

But—

What follows is a sound like that of sticking a bat into the sand of a beach, a sound that is incredibly hard to describe.

It's not a shot, or the sound of metal destroying bone, passing through flesh and blood. It's not the sound of blood spraying either.

There's no sign of a shot anywhere on my body.

But in the corner of my left eye, there suddenly a flash of aqua blue.

"...Wolf?"

The hand that was grabbing me so tightly suddenly lets go, and the body next to mine slowly falls forward.

"Wolf?"

His back is slowly approaching the flaming floorboards.

"Wolf? Wolf! Wolfram!"

There's a metal arrow sticking out of the middle of his chest, slightly to the left.

"How can this be...? Wolfram...? What to do, what should I do..."

"...careful... ahead..."

He barely lifts his hand, pointing at the mast of a middle-sized ship. Even though his hand immediately falls back down powerlessly, but I see the man wielding the bow there cutting the rope that tied him to the mast with a small knife after his job is done.

So it was from that height and that distance that he attacked.

Although it doesn't sound too possible, but I saw his face, or at least I think I saw it. Because all I saw was an ugly sanpaku^[3], but I didn't see his eye color or appearance.

Surprisingly, I'm not at all angry, just shivering uncontrollably in fear of losing.

"Is it that man?"

I lay Wolf down on my knees, and lie over his body, putting my ear closer.

It's okay, he's still breathing! There's still breathing.

"...Ki...nan..."

"Eh, what? What are you talking about, I can't hear you? Can this be pulled out? Can I pull the arrow out?"

The tail of the arrow has brown and white stripes. Although we're in a huge blazing fire, but the metal arrow feels exceptionally cold, and the light blue cloak is free of blood stains. But if I simply try to pull it out, there's a high possibility of extreme blood loss, that might end up threatening his life instead.

Wolfram gasps for breath. But his face, contorted in pain from lack of air, is slowly becoming as white as paper.

"...What to do... Someone call the doctor quick... Günter! Günter!"

But at this time Günter just has to be hidden from sight by a wall of flames.

I hold my hand out to the arrow tail, asking if I can do anything. But at the same time I'm scared that just the lightest touch will cause his already shallow breathing to instantly stop.

"Wolf, don't do this! Stop joking around... At a time like this, don't do this to me..."

Isn't maryoku meant for moments like this? That unexplainable power of mine, doesn't it exist so that I can save him?

Quick, concentrate, forget about the commotion around you!

I start imagining Wolfram's wound, ready to slowly accept his pain. I feel the blood flowing in my hands, my shoulders and my chest, then I adjust my heartbeat to follow his.

Just opening my eyes isn't enough. So I use the warmth and pulse travelling through my fingertips, to feel the weak flow of his blood.

At this moment even my breathing starts slowing down, the two of us seem to be separated from the rest of the world by a thin veil, even the heat from the fire is gone.

"...W-Wolf...!"

Lord von Bielefeld releases a heavy breath, and then his whole head loses its strength. The face and eyes that were twitching with pain gradually stop moving, the labored breathing from his mouth becoming inaudible.

But my hand and heart feel no pain.

"Wolf! Wait! What is this? Why can't I feel your pain, and the flow of your blood? Hey, answer me! Say something! Come on, call me a wimp, I don't mind no matter how much you scold me! Quick, call me a wimp!"

I want to lift my hands from my knees and grab his shoulders, shake him, but then my gaze falls to the ground in front of me, to the blood stained army boots on the flaming floor.

"Who--!"

I wanted to yell 'who's there!', but I swallow my words back down.

"How did this happen? That cloak... wasn't that meant to be worn by the king?"

The pale drawn face is tinted red by the flames. I stare at those thin single

eyelids, and that man is staring back at us. That familiar deep brown hair of his is a little messy sticking to his forehead.

“...Nigel Weiss Maxine!”

I’ll never forget your face for the rest of my life!

And I’ll never forgive you till the day I die!

※※※※※

“It’s you!”

By now my surroundings turn a pure white, not the red of fire and not the grey of smoke.

I feel like I’m alone in a valley with a blizzard, snow being blown around by the wind behind my back.

And there’s not even a hint of heat, I guess I wouldn’t even know if my body was burning up. Even though I’m being cut by the white surroundings and cold ice, all I get are wounds that don’t bleed.

I don’t want to wait for anyone’s guidance anymore.

Even if I don’t hear that certain someone’s voice, it doesn’t matter; even though he’s not there behind me to push me on, it doesn’t matter. I just want to use my own power, for that burning rage within my heart.

“How could you have done something like...!”

I swing my tightly-clenched fist at my target.

“Nigel Weiss... Maxine!”

My tone is weird and almost indistinguishable, the nerves connecting the cells in my brain suddenly alight with sparks.

“To get revenge for the king of Shou Shimaron’s attitude, thou actually led your men into a rebellion, thy nerve is inexcusable! In this ever changing world, the people can’t differentiate between the greater good and their personal needs, even a hemiptera [4] can’t help but issue a warning!”

“.....Y-you’re still saying such random things.”

The cropped-pony takes a few steps back in an instant.

Employing the part of my brain I rarely use I continue to spout lines that sound like they come from a historical drama.

"And today we have become angered to the limit! Really really MAX-IMUM! Use your body to experience the killing move released after my energy has been charged to 120%..... Mmph!"

"Stop fooling around, Yuuri! I already told you not to use magic on human soil, how many times do I need to repeat myself for you to understand!"

Wolfram, whose breathing had returned to normal, punches down hard on super-Maou mode Yuuri's head.

"How is this possible? Puu^[5] you, weren't you dead?"

"Don't even try simply cursing me to death, I was just winded by the impact! We aren't even married yet, how can I die!"

No wonder even Yuuri couldn't heal his wound.

"Who knew you can be so active even with an arrow sticking out of your chest, don't tell me you have the blood of an Arrow Mazoku... Ohhhhh, it's pretty exciting to discover another new life form!"

"Of course not!"

Lord von Bielefeld holds the arrow he pulled out with one hand, and reaches into his jacket with his right. There's a deep hole through the thick Collector's Edition novel.

"See, the Poison Lady saved my life. Although I forgot to leave it in the hotel to spread the teachings, but this is the mass-produced version of the Poison Lady available for every household, never forget to bring it out with you wherever you go."

Maxine is so surprised he looks a little awed.

"That's some luck—Puhaa!"

Maxine, who seems to have clean forgotten his position as leader of the rebellion and is calmly rubbing his chin, suddenly flies out from an impact to his

back. As a result, he doesn't even get the chance to grab on to the railings, falling headfirst into the sea.

"Woooooooooooooo--!"

A wail of regret is followed by a high end-note.

The wall of fire disappears in an instant, and in its place appears Günter, on one knee and in nothing but his underwear, the cylinder in his arms spewing copious amounts of white foam.

"Aiya, I put the fire out."

"Hmm... Yup... So to replace the outdated WATER BOYS^[6], the FIRE BOYS protect the people of the world from fires... but whether it's cuttlefish or octopus, you're already so old, calling yourself a BOY would be too funny... So why don't we make it that from today onwards it'll be called the FIRE OLD BOYS..."

"Snap out of it, Yuuri! Turn back into your wimpy self now!"

However, perhaps due to the fact I never got to use my powers, I am stuck in the super Maou mode. Even though he grabs the collar of my chef's outfit, all I can do is cough.

"cough It's decided! cough No objections!"

Impatient Wolfram uses a tone that would have made the usual Shibuya Yuuri write the alphabet in miniature under the tennis court with his tears, threatening:

"If you don't revert back to normal I'll use the prince's kiss to wake you up!"

"Today's method of awakening..... Phoosh..."

The sound of air deflating is emitted from my nose and ears, and my raised eyebrows successfully return to their original position. And so the authoritative pomp young general turns back into the average baseball boy.

"Hey, wait. So you hate kissing me so much? If so, I'll feel a little hurt."

"What are you talking about, Wolfram? Of course His Majesty doesn't like kissing you!"

Günter throws down the fire-extinguishing cylinder, snatching Yuuri from the former prince's clutches.

"...Eh... Wolf... Why are you suddenly okay...Wah—Günter, why are you naked--?"

"Aaah, Your Majesty noticed? Please, don't worry, I, Günter von Christ, left the last piece out of gentlemanly manners. Of course, this is all for Your Majesty..."

"If it's for me then don't wear those sexy G-strings, wear trunks!"

"G-strings? [7] Trunks [8]? Do both these proper nouns refer to men?"

Even though he was just in a life-and-death situation, but his ability to create bad jokes with his misunderstandings hasn't been affected in the slightest.

"They're men's, all right! But it isn't homo, it's G-strings!"

The boat suddenly begins to tilt, and the soldiers start yelling.

References

1. ↑ The actual term for weather doll is 'sunny doll' in the Chinese raws xD It fits seeing as Wolf is such a bright and sunny person~
2. ↑ Shishi-odoshi (鹿威し lit. "scare the deer") refers to Japanese devices made to scare away birds and beasts damaging agriculture. Yup, that bamboo water fountain thing you always see in anime, filling up with water until it tips and makes this 'clinking' noise whenever the show gets too silent.
3. ↑ Some sort of eye condition (lit “three whites”) where you can see the whites of the eyes above or below the iris. Generally a bad sign in Chinese superstition, meaning either the person himself is a no-good bum or will meet with great misfortune.
4. ↑ Some sort of insect with half-wings.
5. ↑ Puu is the short form of "purinsu" (prince) in Japanese, it's disrespectful.

Wolfram's nickname is Wagamama Puu (Spoiled Little Prince), but it seems he's not spoiled anymore and his nickname shortened.

6. [↑](#) Water Boys is a popular japanese movie of comedy.
7. [↑](#) The word for strings in Japanese is apparently 'himo' :3 Wolf reads it as 'homo'
8. [↑](#) 'Trunks' is a reference to Dragon Ball!! Finally, a reference that I get! XDD

Chapter 10

Chapter 10

The crew starts running towards the helm, and those who can't escape in time jump directly into the sea.

Everyone's holding hands as we climb up the slanting deck, then gripping the railings tightly. The cargo ship that was originally stopped beside us is speedily leaving in fears of being caught up in the calamity. Only the first few soldiers to jump across are now catching their breath on the deck.

Just then, someone yells, "The boat's sinking."

"The boat's sinking, quick, jump onboard!"

I wrap my arm around Wolfram's waist, then hold my breath and prepare to jump.

"Your Majesty!"

"Günter, if we don't get away soon, the boat's gonna sink!"

The Special Ambassador clad only on his underwear and with his hair a mess, shakes my shoulders with a spine-chilling expression, making me feel like even my dried-out brain juices are sloshing around in my skull.

"Your Majesty, please forgive my bringing up an unreasonable request at a time like this. I'm a ghost, a devil, and Covenant Castle is like the Temple of Exorcism! Logically speaking now I should be strongly advising Your Majesty, and trying to stop your actions, but even if later I am cursed by the people or punished accordingly, I do not mind... so..."

"W-w-w-w-what do you want to say, G-G-G-G-Gun..."

I'm begging you to stop shaking me, as I desperately try to hold up my powerless neck.

"...Everything shall be done as Your Majesty wishes."

Those violet eyes veil a flash of bitterness. But Günter immediately changes his

mind, pointing at the rapidly departing cargo ship.

He's pointing at Lord Weller, who's sticking his body out, and Saralegui, hugging the railings tightly. They're sandwiched in between the Shou Shimaron crew.

"Go, Your Majesty. If you miss this opportunity to go to Seisakoku, there won't be another!"

"But the boat... and you guys..."

"Captain Sizemore's on his way, we'll be fine!"

Wolfram roughly grabs my hand, and says simply,

"Don't worry so much, just go! And then you must return safely... Gurrier!"

Josak runs up to us, tossing away bucket of water and gripping a rope.

Just in case, he even tugs at the thing in his hand several times, replying as he tests its strength, "Here!"

"Protect Yuuri properly."

"Yessir. Then, Your Majesty, please pardon my rudeness."

Before I can ask what he wants to do, Josak has already lifted me into his arms carefully, then he lifts his heels on the slanted deck, and the next second we're already on the ocean surface.

"Waa—What are you doing... We're gonna fall!"

But the waves pass under our feet like blue stripes. Right now the rope is wrapped around the mast of the cargo ship, which means to say that Josak wants to send me to that ship from this one. Next, I use the skills picked up during outdoor excursions as a kid, and personally become a temporary Tarzan.

"Aaaaa—Aaaaa--- Aaaa—Waa—!"

"...This angle ain't that good."

I even hear a displeased 'tsk' by my ear!

"Josak!"

Lord Weller immediately rushes to diagonally below us, his expression solemn

and his arms open wide.

“Hurry!”

In that moment the childhood playmates exchange a glance.

“Sorry, Young Master.”

Shin Makoku’s well-honed intelligence officer doesn’t even finish his sentence, before he throws me into the air.

I wail with a long endnote, “That’s too much—” And then I fall towards the deck of the cargo ship. At first I thought I would crash into the deck, so I curl myself up into a ball. But surprisingly, the impact I’m waiting for doesn’t come.

“Weird?”

Turns out Conrad, who had moved directly underneath me, had already caught me firmly.



“...Con...”

He very quickly puts me down, then carelessly helps me pat away the soot on my clothes.

“Are you hurt?”

“...No.”

“That’s good.”

Having finally gotten here, Captain Sizemore rescuing the people in the water, one by one. Seeing my friends in their ranks, I feel a weight lifted off my chest.

As for Josak, who had slammed into the mast, he’s now sliding down the pole looking half-dead. His nose and forehead are bright red, and his orange hair are messy as flames.

“Ow ow oww, someone come help me.”

“Josak!”

I use my injured subordinate as an excuse, escaping from that suffocating space.

“Ah! Your Majesty, thank goodness you’re safe. On the other hand, it seems like Gurrier must ask Lady Cheri for whip-using pointers!”

Over the mischievous Josak’s shoulders, I see the beautiful ship snapped into two.

Shou Shimaron’s flagship, ‘The Golden Salmon’ sinks just like that, while red flame and black smoke rise from the sky and the sea.

※※※※※

Saralegui sits on the deck despondently, covering his face with his slender fingers.

“I... I...”

The voice muffled in his palm is shaking with uncertainty.

“I know the opposing forces should have been immediately quieted down, after all Storob is an excellent soldier. And there’s still Shin Makoku’s warship for reinforcements. Even if we were to be ambushed and take some damage, there’s still an overwhelming difference in military power. Only...”

There are only two medium-sized cargo ships leaving the war port at full speed. Considering this is a long distance trip for the king of Shou Shimaron, it counts as an imperfect guard force.

“Only, the final outcome is that all I got is this cargo ship, and now I’m heading

to an unfamiliar land with no real trustworthy subordinates. What should I do after this..."

"C'mon, you'll be fine."

He is someone raised since young as royalty. Even if he's an expert at governing the people, there's no way he would know how to take care of himself. Even I can only pat his shoulder or grip his hand to console him.

"Relax, Sara. There'll be a way."

"Yuuri, there's one more even scarier thing!"

The hand that has never before lifted any loads, grips my calloused hand tightly. He raises his face, expression tragic, and I realize that those eyes hidden behind the thin lenses are still brimming with tears that may fall at any time.

"I nearly had you killed."

"What does that mean?"

"You... No, the reason your friend was shot at, is most probably because of my cloak."

"So that's what it was!"

After hearing him say that, my previous suspicions now make sense. The man who was tied to the middle of the mast and shot Wolfram, wouldn't be able to tell who was wearing the cloak from that height. But that shooter had unhesitatingly loosed his arrow at Wolfram, not me. That time Wolfram had said a name, though, what was that person called again?

"Ki...nan..."

Kinan? Wolfram did say something like Kinan back then.

Although it's a name I've never heard before, but that man wasn't aiming for Lord von Bielefeld, his attack was directed at the light blue cloak.

At the shiny cloak that Shou Shimaron king Saralegui normally wore.

"Your friend took that arrow in the chest for me... I-if, back then the person wearing the cloak was Yuuri, whenever I think that it could've been you... I... When Storob called me over, I should've just asked him to board the ship with

me. If only I'd never returned to land, and just stayed on 'The Golden Salmon'. Or if I could've made it back on to the flagship in time, instead of being late... I shouldn't have waited to switch ships after reaching the outer sea. It'd be fine if I'd just stayed on 'The Golden Salmon' like a good boy!"

"...But in that case, you would've been the one attacked, Saralegui."

I gently put my arm around Saralegui's shoulder, as he sobs uncontrollably.

"Because you don't have the Poison Lady's protection, you could've died if you weren't careful."

Since he doesn't understand what I'm saying, he's shocked there for a moment. But those unbidden tears still flow from his lost-looking eyes.

His shoulders, so slender they're like a girl's, are shaking unstoppably in guilt.

I think to myself, "This won't work, this child can't protect himself. As a king who leads the people and runs the country, he doesn't have any skills necessary to protect himself."

"It's okay, Sara. Wolfram is fine, and there aren't any deep wounds either, so it's really fine."

"I regret it, I regret it so much. Why did I give you that cloak?"

"Wasn't it because you were scared I'd get cold? You were scared that the sea breeze and the sunlight were too strong, that's why you kindly lent me your cloak. Thank you, I was really very happy."

"Yuuri, you really are so gentle. I just don't know how to make it up... to your friend..."

Saralegui cups his face with his right hand, and before long starts sobbing. Only until my fingertips are getting chilly in his grip, does he finally stop his tears flowing, and those eyes staring out at the sea finally regain their old light. He uses his fingers, damp with tears, to push his pale golden hair behind his ear.

"There's only one way I can compensate."

He heaves a long sigh, then says in a soft but determined voice, "The only way I can make it up to you and your friend, is by leading this ship and sending you safely to Seisakoku. That's all I can do."

“Saralegui.”

“The interactions upon reaching there, are between Shin Makoku and Seisakoku, something I can’t interfere with. But following the flow of the current, navigating the sea according to the nautical map and the stars... sending you to the Seisakoku jetty at the ends of the sea, that’s something I can do.”

Releasing my hand, Saralegui stands facing me and hugs my waist, asking excitedly, “What do you think, Yuuri? Is doing that enough?”

“Actually, you... don’t have to mind so much.”

The boy king, now alone after losing his subordinates, runs away the drying tears on his face, then turns his gaze behind me, that’s a look of focus.

“Lord Weller.”

“Yes.”

The voice comes from somewhere not too far from me, scaring me in spite of myself.

“You said before that Dai Shimaron is like a parent to Shou Shimaron. As His Highness Belar the Second’s appointed ambassador, you have the responsibility to report and invigilate my country so we don’t do anything out of line, yes?”

“That’s right.”

“And also the responsibility to make sure Shou Shimaron’s rights are not infringed, as well as giving suitable assistance.”

The ambassador from Dai Shimaron nods in lieu of a reply, and waits for him to continue.

“I’m ready to head to Seisakoku with Yuuri. Therefore, I have to commandeer this unfamiliar ship, deal with the hardships of the ocean, and may even be in mortal danger.”

Lord Weller gives him a sideways glance with those pale brown eyes, predicting what the next line will be, the silver irises hiding a gleam.

Saralegui speaks in a strong and challenging tone. He, who had just been on the edge of cliff, seems to have been saved from despair and gotten back onto

his feet, his words showing glimpses of his strength.

“Are you willing to protect me?”

The Dai Shimaron ambassador, whose fringe is billowing in the sea breeze, pauses for several seconds before nodding and saying, “I will do my best to protect you.”



I use the secret technique of finding the emergency exit in hotels, and start wandering the deck of another country’s ship. I give the hardworking Shou Shimaron crew a sideways glance, then I walk around to the back of the thick mast. When I sit down on the wooden box there, the damp sea breeze blows my hair into a mess.

I bend my body to put my head between my knees, my eyes seeing only the wooden floorboards.

“You’re just too mean, Young Master. If you want to go for a walk, you should’ve invited me, Gurrier, too!”

The joking tone and what looks like borrowed military boots approach me, and then he sits down so close to me he can almost touch my legs. His arm seems to wrap around me, landing on the back of my white kitchen uniform.”

“But I never would have thought.”

He uses a rare solemn tone, saying at the most comfortable distance from my ear, “Is it because you have to take care of yourself, so you’re feeling really lonely?”

“No.”

I shake my head slowly.

If I had that confidence and corresponding ability, then I wouldn’t need to bother anyone.

“...I’m real hungry, so much so I can barely move, since I practically haven’t eaten anything since yesterday morning.”

Next to me, Josak’s body trembles as he laughs heartily.

"Aww, you poor thing! Humans will get hungry whenever, be it at weddings or funerals!"

He doesn't forget to add 'Of course, Mazoku too'. So we can continue living on.

And the only redemption is the fact that we're on sea.

Surely the waves can take away any sort of emotion.

Afterword

Murata Ken's Declaration of Friends on the Sea

"Build up those buff muscles! Musclemen! Use the power of your inner thigh! Musclemen—G'day, I'm Murata Ken, also known as Muraken."

"Eh? Uh, I'm not a flighty character, right~ So I shouldn't have 'mura[\[1\]](#)'..."

"You're Shibuya, so you have the 'ya' (canyon), right?"

"...What do you think we're talking about, maps? Come to think of it, why are you singing the Girl's Day song? Isn't it already April? If you want to sing, you should be singing 'Can We Keep a Hundred Friends'[\[2\]](#)!"

"Geez, I can't stand you—How am I singing the Girl's Day song? I'm just singing 'Rejoice! The Followers of the Muscle Club'! Oh, yeah, Shibuya, what's the award you want to win the most in this lifetime?"

"Award? Why are you randomly asking? Although honestly, my life these past sixteen years had nothing to do with 'awards'. So as long as I can win an award, I don't really care which one. Like the Police Overseer Award's not bad, feels like an avatar of justice. But if I really want an award, it should be the 'Best Nine' or the 'Golden Mitt', I guess."

"Whoa~ The Golden Globe! I get it, I get it. Although it's known as the prelude to the Oscar's, but they do have somewhat different qualities."

"I think you got it wrong."

"How about this then, what is the thing you treasure the most?"

"What? You change topics way too quickly. The thing I treasure the most... should be my family, friends and comrades. Mn—In a wider sense, I guess it's my relationships? After all, that's not something you can get just by working hard."

"Relationships, huh. True, mm. Shibuya, you're absolutely right, and you just entered everybody's once-every-thirty-six-years limited time only great luck with the ladies promotion period."

"Wait, what did you say? Once every thirty-six years? Meaning if I miss out on this, I'll have to face the next thirty-six years without any luck with the ladies? Waa—But during this limited time only great luck with the ladies promotion period, out of all the people interested in me, there's only one girl of the same age. Even though the others are all super pretty, they're all guys!"

"What about the maidmer princess? She's obviously a girl, right?"

"You say she's a girl, but she's female, female, a female creature!"

"Shibuya, you really are something, making friends not only with the humans on land, but the number of your friends on the sea are increasing rapidly too, everything between maidmer princesses to Sasai-san."

"Sa-Sasai-san?"

"That's right, Sa-sai-saan, Sasai-saaan, Sasai-saaaan born in Sakai Moving Company^[3]—Chang, changchang—changlang. Chang, changchang—changlang, chang, changchang—changlang, chang, changchang—changchangchang, pang!"

"...They work hard too."^[4]

"Then, what'll happen to Kuchii-san next week? The man crossing borders, Shibuya Yuuri seems like he'll be getting more friends on the sea."

"...How do I cross borders... But Murata, friendships can be built in many ways. It's different from love, and doesn't require a sacrifice from one person, as long as someone is in the same circumstances and age range, we can confess our worries or be honest with each other, and grow the sprout of friendship!"

"Uhm—That's a very mature opinion! But Shibuya, don't you have friends on earth?"

"Eh, ah? H-how is that possible?"

"Ah, what is there to be surprised about? You're being very weird, you know. Aside from your teammates on the baseball team, the truth is you don't have any friends, do you? Why don't you tell me about your rotten friends or childhood friends, or the mild memories of your first love?"

"Ahh forget about any childhood friends, my family never even showed me any of my baby pictures."

"What? Then that's weird~ Maybe you had horns or a tail—Or perhaps you had a plate on your head, and the mark 666 somewhere on your body..."

"That's not even human anymore... By the way, who's the guy with 666?"

"I give up."

"Really? Is he that far gone... Batting percentage is 6.66, I thought it'd be a foreign troop or something. But looking at that number, guess it's not something a human can do. Wait, could it be a jersey number? Are you talking about jersey numbers?"

"I'll advise you to look for your baby photos."

"W-what are you doing, Murata? Why are you suddenly so serious? W-what do you know..."

Afterword

[Recap/summary, lots of stuff about the anime coming out, how surprised and flustered sensei is, puns and references with people's names I don't get T^T Oh, and ads for new merch, and... stuff?]

Right, we're finally entering the book's main topic. Because I like talking nonsense a lot, so I end up saying a ton in the foreword, and the main topic gets pushed way to the back. Ah, I thought so, there's only one page left? Actually this book is roughly divided into three ideas. One, a brand new 'how can this be' development. Two, the title will now graduate from 'Ma no-'. Three, Günter should get a chance to act cool once in a while. The first thing is, as mentioned in Murata's Declaration of Friends on the Sea, Shibuya Yuuri is entering his 'good luck with ladies' phase, and three was me writing with the full intention of showing Günter in his full cool glory, that's why I requested that the cover was 'Günter drawn in a manly way', and the final product really was a beautiful and handsome Günter-- Temari-san, thank you so much! Me: "Then the actual story must make him as cool as the cover!" GEG: "...There's something wrong here, something just feels off to me." What's off—As long as it's for His Majesty, the

man who isn't scared of misunderstandings, the man chosen as special ambassador with full authority, his name is Lord von Christ Günter! He's already cool to the point no one else can reach.

The remaining point two... Why is there still 'Ma no-' this time? You haven't graduated at all? On a side note, the original title of the book was 'As Long As I'm By the Maou's Side'. Sounds just like a British spy movie, feels pretty good.

Anyway, we've finally entered a brand new chapter. As this is the long-anticipated main story, even if I throw Shibuya into an unbearably cruel situation, I will still make him live actively and energetically. Actually I'm feeling a bit dazed by the changes around me, too, like how the anime is completely different from the original work, but I will put in my all as well, hoping that the novels won't lose to it, and I hope everyone will also accompany the characters in the book to a brand new land.

It's all thanks to the support from all you readers, that 'Ma' can achieve all that it has today.

Takabayashi Tomo

References

1. ↑ 'Mura' sounds like 'madara', which means spots. When you're a steadfast and unchanging character, they say you 'don't have spots'.
2. ↑ A popular song amongst Japanese middle schoolers
3. ↑ Sasai is supposed to refer to Saralegui(?!)
4. ↑ That was probably the ad jingle of the company, and Yuuri is saying the catchphrase.